

APRIL 6 07 GOOD FRIDAY MT. 27:13-66

## WHO TOOK YOUR PLACE

When I was in the Buffalo church there was a woman by the name of miss Hazel Troutman. She was a school teacher by trade and taught as a sub until she was in her late 70s. She had taught the fathers, mothers, brothers and sisters, and later was teaching their children. She was kind of gruff once in awhile, but down deep she was a softy. She always parked her car in the same spot where she hitched their wagon when they came to church before they had a car. In fact one of those iron poles where you hitched the horses is still there, and that was miss Hazels parking spot and everybody knew it. And then in church she sat in the rear of the church in the Troutman pew where her and her family always sat. Well one day when the church started to grow miss Hazel came to church and guess what. Someone was in her pew. They did not know any better, and she stood there, and stood there, and stood right by her pew but the person sitting there did not move. Finally she said, 'This is my pew.' So the person sitting there apologized and went to find another seat. After that no one dared sit in Miss Hazel's pew.

Let me share an old email story I received awhile ago. One day a man went to visit a church. He got there early, parked his car and got out. Another car pulled up and the driver got out and said, 'I always park there! You took my place!' The visitor went inside for Sunday school, found an empty seat and sat down. A young lady from the church approached him and stated, 'That's my seat! You took my place!' The visitor was somewhat distressed by this rude welcome but said nothing. After Sunday school the visitor went into the Sanctuary and sat down, and another member walked up to him and said, 'That's where I always sit! You took my place!' The visitor was even more troubled by this treatment but still he said nothing. Later as the congregation was praying for Christ to dwell among them the visitor stood up, and his appearance began to change. Horrible scars became visible on his hands and on his sandaled feet. Someone from the congregation noticed him and called out, 'What happened to you?' The visitor replied as his hat became a crown of thorns, and a tear fell from his eye, 'I took your place.'

That's what Good Friday is all about. Jesus took your place on an old rugged cross. He took your place of damnation because of your sinful nature. He took your place that should send you to hell. Though you may not know it, on the cross he took your place so that you would not have to suffer and die.

We are reminded that the cross is a symbol of suffering and shame. Every year on Good Friday we remember Jesus' suffering on that old rugged cross. But sometimes we forget the beatings and the mocking that occurred before the cross. They say that the violence in the movie 'The Passion' was too much for people to bare. But in all reality people didn't want to see all that violence because first of all we don't like to think Jesus had to suffer like that. Second I don't think we want to think our sinful nature caused all that suffering.

I wish there could have been some other way for us to have salvation. God tried many times to offer salvation, but the people always turned away. He gave the people the Law, but it became too hard to follow. People still stole, still envied what each had, still committed adultery, still killed one another, still took God's name in vain, still worshipped idols. All these Laws we call the 10 Commandments were there to help people be 'set aside' people who would follow God when they entered the promise land. They were there to help them learn how to get along with each other and how to remember the God that called them 'His People.' But as we know it wasn't only Moses who broke the 10 Commandments. No, the people did it over and over again. So God sent prophet after prophet to tell the people to, to turn to God, but many ignored them. Because of their rebellion God seemed to have punished them and sent them into exile once more. After 400 years God spoke through John the

Baptist who came preaching a message of repentance telling the people to turn from their wickedness, and that one was coming who would baptize them with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

Who was that? None other than Jesus, God's only Son. At just the right time when God's people called out to God for help he sent his son. From birth some wanted to get rid of him, yet some believed. When Jesus was 30 he began the ministry that God sent him to the world to do. At his baptism God prepared him to be on the road to the cross. Many wonderful things he did over those years. Wonderful stories are found in Scripture about his healings and raising the dead. Still, some believed he was God's Son, and many others didn't. Even the religious right of his day struggled with Jesus being the true Messiah the one that was foretold was coming. Even when he healed on the Sabbath, or healed people in the Synagogue on the Sabbath these people did not rejoice in what God did. No! They complained because Jesus was not keeping the Sabbath law. A person is able to stretch out a withered arm now healed, and these so called religious leaders could only see a Law being broken, not a soul being healed. They clamored, 'he broke the law.' Never mind that a miracle just took place.

And now, this night that we call Good ends with Jesus in the tomb sealed by the soldiers so no one could steal his body. They stand guard in shifts. They better do their job or else they would pay the price.

So tonight we reflect on that day, on that cross, and at the tomb.

That faithful day Pilate had the power to release Jesus but he chose not to. Even his wife told him not to get involved but he did anyway. After all he was in charge of this city. He had the power. But this case he was trying would not be a simple one. So to try and appease the people he sends Jesus off to be whipped almost to the point of death. They made a crown of thorns and put it on his head. They found a purple cloak and threw it around his shoulders as if he was royalty. Then they spit on him, hit him over and over again. They pushed him one way then the other making a game of what they were doing. You want to hear something amazing? It seems Jesus didn't cry out for them to stop. He didn't look with anger into their faces. No! He looked into their faces with love. He looked into their faces with the love of the Father in heaven. Perhaps it was there under his breath he kept repeating over and over and over again, 'Father, forgive them.'

Once more he is brought bruised and beaten to Pilate. Pilate looks at him and may have thought his soldiers went a little to far. But it was over now. So in order to make it up to the Jews perhaps for this beating he brings before them another man who caused lots of trouble in the Jewish community. Some say he was an insurgent. Some say he was just a thief a murderer. Perhaps he had a reputation among the Jewish people so great they had

wanted him off the street for good, so he was heading for execution. But this was a Jewish holiday, the Passover, so Pilate, as a good gesture, had the right to release one prisoner who deserved to die. He calls for Barabbas to be brought to him. This man who looked rough and tough, fought with the guards as he is placed side by side with the bleeding Jesus. Pilate looks to the crowd and says, ‘I can release one man this day to freedom. You have your choice. Do you want this hated criminal Barabbas among you once again to create havoc? Or do you want me to release this man named Jesus who has not done anything wrong that I can see. He has done many wonderful things among your people. I can’t find anything to condemn him for. You say he is a king, but I don’t see his kingdom. Who do you want released?’ And we know the stirred up crowd shouted to let Barabbas go. And when asked what he should do with Jesus, they yelled for him to be crucified.

As Barabbas is being released, perhaps Jesus looked him in the eyes with a smile that seemed to say it all. Maybe he didn’t say the words, but that smile said ‘Barabbas I’m taking your place.’

You know we never do hear what ever happened to him, but maybe, just maybe he didn’t leave town so quickly. Maybe he followed Jesus as he was lead out to be crucified. Maybe he was there when they drove the nails into Jesus’ hand and feet. Maybe each time the hammer rang out as it drove the nail further and further into

his body, tears came to his eyes, because he knew if it hadn't been for Jesus, this might have been him they were nailing to the cross.

Maybe he stayed around as part of the crowd watching as some hecklers kept yelling at Jesus, and then the voice from the thief on the cross was heard, asking Jesus to remember him when he came into his kingdom. It a plea. It was a heart changing plea, one that could only come from one who finally got it right, that Jesus was who he said he was. Then this thief heard wonderful words of life as Jesus said, 'Today you will be with me in paradise.'

Those six hours passed slowly. People waited for Jesus' death. The soldiers gambled for his clothing because they had nothing else to do. The religious leaders stayed around because they wanted to make sure this man claiming to be the Messiah was dead and out of their way.

His mother Mary was there crying, and hurting every time her son cried out in pain. She was comforted by her friends, others who followed Jesus, people who believed in Jesus because they were touched by him. She remembers her own pain when she brought Jesus into the world. No one was around on that day, except Joseph and all the animals. Those who came to see her new baby were shepherds and wise men who brought gifts fit for

a king. She remembers how she was told that one day her heart would be broken as her son took on the roll of Savior of Israel and the world. Now she cries, as she along with other friends wait for Jesus to take his final breath.

Then there was the leader of the Roman soldiers who kept watch. He made sure none of the people could get close. For six hours he watched this man go through agony. Jesus' heart was strong. His will was strong. But there seemed to be a time that he could not bare it no more as he cries out to the Father, 'Father, why have you forsaken me? Why, Father, why?' But no answer came. Then as Jesus seems to look right into the eyes of everyone gathered around him at the foot of the cross, soldiers included, along with Barabbas, he gently says to the Father, 'Father forgive them. Forgive them for their sins. Forgive them because they know not what they are doing. Father not just these forgive, but forgive the whole world of their sins. Forgive those who will come after me and believe in me. Forgive them Father as I take their place on this cross today.' With that he looks to the Father and says, 'It's time father. Father I have felt the pain of all the sins of the whole world. It is time to release the captives who are being held in bondage to sin. I've paid the price you have asked. Father let my people go.'

I've taken their place. They are forgiven. Father, it is finished. Into your hands I commit my spirit for all eternity. I come now to prepare a place for all who will believe in me.' Then he died.

The rains came down, the thunder shook the very foundation of the earth for what seemed an eternity. Lightning flashed across the sky like they never seen before. The temple curtain was split into 2 pieces and the religious leaders didn't know what to make of it. They were all scared. They wandered around like sheep without a shepherd. Just as quickly as this happened, the violent weather came to a halt. When the soldiers checked, Jesus was dead. To make sure they drove a spear into his side, but they did not break any bones in his body. When it was all over the Centurion looked to the cross and said, 'Surely this was the Son of God.' And a crying, sobbing Barabbas cries, 'He didn't deserve to die. I did. He took my place.' And off he went to who knows where. But one thing I think is that he no longer was the same man. He was transformed by the Grace of God.

Tonight we come to remember that Jesus took our place on that cross. We can picture the scene as they hurriedly take Jesus down from the cross, wipe the blood and sweat from his body quickly, wrap him in the clothing for burial, carry him off to his tomb and place him there until after the Sabbath when they could come back to give him a proper burial. They watch as the guards seal the tomb and they post the first shift of the night

to guard the tomb because the religious leaders are afraid some followers of Jesus would come and steal his body and say he has risen. So the grieving women, along with John, Nicodemus and Joseph who gave them the grave stay for a few minutes with tears flowing for their loved one is gone.

Let me read from Max Lucado's *He Chose the Nails* about this day we call Good Friday. "Watch as the soldiers shove the carpenter to the ground and stretch his arms against the beams. One presses a knee against a forearm, and a spike against a hand. Jesus turns his face towards the nail, just as the soldier lifts the hammer to strike it. Couldn't Jesus have stopped him? The mallet rings, the skin rips, and the blood begins to drip, then rush. Why didn't Jesus resist? "Because He loves us," we reply. And that is true, wonderfully true. But forgive me.... It's only partially true. As the soldier pressed his arm, Jesus rolled his head to the side. And with cheek resting on the wood, He saw a list. A long list. A list of our mistakes, our lusts, our lies, our greedy moments and prodigal years. He saw a record of our sins, a tabulation of our faults. That's why He refused to close his fist. He saw the list. He knew the price of those sins was death. He knew the source of those sins was you. And since he couldn't bear the thought of eternity without you, He chose nails.. Your failures are blotted out, covered by the blood of

God's Son. That is why Jesus did not resist the nails. It was God's idea. The hand that swung the hammer was the hand of God. And as the hands of Jesus opened for the nail, the doors of heaven opened for you."

Remember the end of the story I told earlier from that email? When the congregation was praying for Christ to dwell among them this visitor stood and his appearance began to change. Horrible scars became visible on his hands and on his sandaled feet. Some one from the congregation called out, 'What happened to you?' The visitor replied, as his hat became a crown of thorns, and a tear fell from his eye, 'I took your place.'

As they rolled the stone to seal the tomb, we are reminded that on the cross that day Jesus took our place. That was Friday, and Sunday's coming.

