

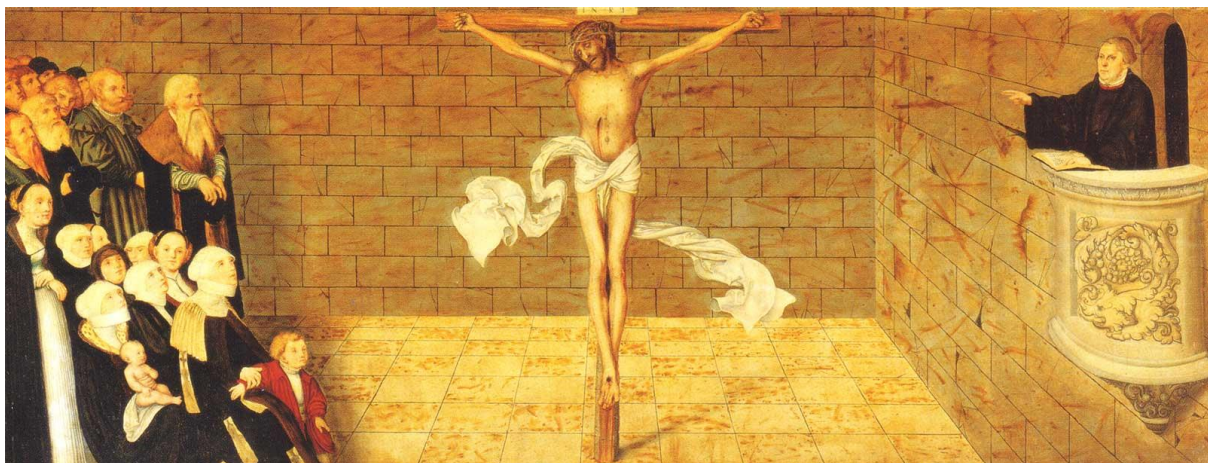
Gospel Reflections - Good Friday 10 April 2020

John 18 and 19



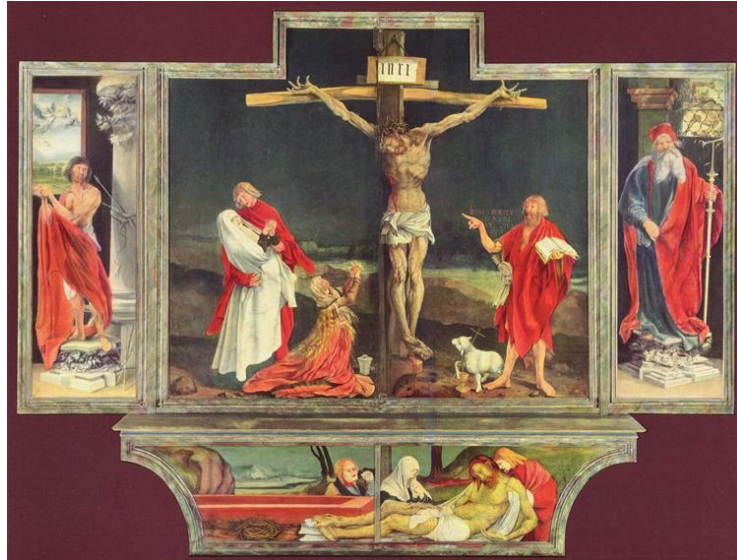
So, it's Good Friday. What's the point?

There is a special art work that hangs in the City Church in Wittenberg, Germany. Lucas Cranach's (1547) *Wittenberg Altarpiece* is the focal point of the church. Cranach was a contemporary of Luther and these paintings aim to capture much of the essence of the Reformation – it's a kind of 'Spot the Reformer'. How many can you identify? While there is much to consider about the overall work, it is the lower section that most caught my eye when I saw it some years ago on a 'Luther tour'.



What do you notice? That Luther is the preacher, that he has one hand on his Bible, that there are men, women and children present, that they are all looking at Jesus rather than the pastor, that Luther is pointing at the crucified Christ or that it is the stark dying Jesus that dominates the picture? Quite a bit to contemplate and, as they say, 'unpack'.

It was the pointing Luther that reminded me of another famous art work painted about 30 years earlier. It is Matthias Grünewald's, *Isenheim Altarpiece*, (circa 1510-15) which is in the chapel of the Hospital of Saint Anthony, Isenheim, Germany. Not sure if there is some connection between the two works but there are certainly some similarities about them. Not just for the four panelled altarpiece and the crucifixion but more so it is the man also pointing at the crucified Jesus. This man is John the Baptist.



Jump now to today's reading for Good Friday (John chapters 18 and 19). The Gospel writer John paints his own word picture of Jesus' crucifixion. Notice in 19:35, *immediately* after Jesus dies, John writes, *"The man who saw it, has given testimony, and his testimony is true. He knows that he tells the truth, and he testifies that you may believe. These things happened so that the scriptures would be fulfilled"*. Many believe this man to be the disciple John himself, **pointing** as it were, **to the crucified Jesus**.

If you flip back to the first chapter of John's Gospel, we hear echoes of this when he speaks of John the Baptist pointing to Jesus as the coming Messiah; *"There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. John 1: 6-8 ...and a little later in verse 34, 'I have seen and I testify that this is God's Chosen One."*

These three men, John the Baptist, John the Disciple and Luther, give testimony to the most significant man in the most significant moment in human history. The whole story of God redeeming his people comes down to this moment - Jesus' death on the cross. As one of my Pastors used to say in confirmation lessons, "Everything in the Old Testament points to the coming of Jesus, everything in the New Testament points back to Jesus. Well, it's all about Jesus really." In Jesus' death, everything that God ever intended for the redemption of his creation is fulfilled; he found a way to bring back and restore all those he loves. It is a love fulfilled for all humanity, a love for each individual. It is a love for you.

John Eldridge, in explaining the core of God's plan for the world, points to the importance of Jesus' death in this way; *"The life and death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth answer once and for all the question, "What is God's heart toward me?" At the point of our deepest betrayal, when we had run our farthest from him and gotten so lost we could never find our way home, God came and died*

to rescue us. You have never been loved like this. He has come to save you in every way a person can be saved. This is God's heart toward you. (Page 72, 'Epic' by John Eldridge, 2004)

As for all Christians, Lutheran school staff too are in illustrious company. Like John the Baptist, the disciple John, Luther, Eldridge, Grunwald and Cranach (just for starters) we too are called to point to Jesus. What a privilege each day to point our children, parents and the wider community to the man who is the way, the truth and the life. Every chapel, devotion, newsletter, lesson, even policy, art works and personal interaction is an opportunity for us to point to Jesus...*that all might believe.*

Get the point?

Have a peaceful and reflective Good Friday, and a joy-filled Easter to come.

Mark

'At great cost he has saved me and redeemed me, a lost and condemned person. He has freed me from sin, death, and the power of the devil – not with silver or gold, but with his holy and precious blood and his innocent suffering and death. All this he has done that I may be his own, live under him in his kingdom, and serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness, just as he is risen from the dead and lives and reigns eternally.' – Luther's Small Catechism