

**Midweek Lenten Service**  
**March 11, 2009**  
**Matthew 26:36-45**

*“The Wound of Apathy”*

“Sacred Head, Now Wounded” is the theme for our midweek Lenten worship services this year. Week by week, we are focusing on various wounds which brought about Jesus’ suffering and death – the wounds of our own sinfulness which wounded his sacred head as we will sing in that familiar Lenten hymn. Last week, we examined the wound of betrayal as Judas Iscariot handed over Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. Today, we focus our attention on the wound of apathy as Peter, James, and John fall asleep while in the Garden of Gethsemane. They sleep while the Lord Jesus struggles under the crushing load of what is before him – drinking down to the final, bitter dregs the cup of God’s fury and wrath against our spiritual apathy and our pathetic indifference toward our Maker and Redeemer. As we contemplate this wound of apathy, may the Holy Spirit move us to greater faithfulness that we may stay awake with Christ; that we may not come into the time of trial. For as Jesus tells us, **“The spirit is indeed willing, but the flesh is weak”** (Matthew 26:41).

You have probably heard of what are called the seven deadly sins – those vices classified as the most serious and objectionable by early Christian leaders, and used to educate believers about man’s tendency to fall into sin. The seven deadly sins include lust, gluttony, greed, sloth, wrath, envy, and pride. It is that deadly sin of sloth that connects us with the wound of apathy. “More than other sins, the definition of **sloth** has changed considerably since its original inclusion among the seven deadly sins. In fact it was first called the sin of **sadness** or **despair**. It had been in the early years of Christianity characterized by what modern writers would now describe as melancholy: apathy, depression, and joylessness — the last being viewed as being a refusal to enjoy the goodness of God and the world God created. Originally, its place was fulfilled by two other aspects, *acedia* and sadness. The former described a spiritual apathy that affected the faithful by discouraging them from their religious work. Sadness (*tristitia* in Latin) described a feeling of dissatisfaction or discontent, which caused unhappiness with one’s current situation... The modern view of the vice is that it represents the failure to utilize one’s talents and gifts... more a sin of omission than of commission” (*Wikipedia*, “seven deadly sins”). I find that early definition of sloth to be very helpful: apathy, depression, joylessness, a refusal to enjoy the goodness of God. We know today that depression is a medical condition – not a sin, but it does impact our relationship with God and with others. The wound of apathy can go very deep within us.

The spiritual apathy in our lives may certainly be a “It’s no big deal” kind of attitude toward God, toward sin. We may delude ourselves into thinking that because God is merciful and kind, we can do whatever we want. Go with Jesus into the Garden of Gethsemane and see whether or not it’s no big deal. Look at him as he sweats drops of blood in his agony (Luke 22:44), struggling with the enormity of our sinful indifference and apathy, and what this will mean for him – betrayal and mock trial, humiliation and torture, excruciating pain of body, mind, and spirit as he dies upon the cross as he is abandoned by all, even the Father in heaven (Matthew 27:46). To Jesus, all of this is a very big deal. Is it to us? In our self-absorbed, me-first culture, is Jesus’ agony in the garden over the burden of his people a big deal to us?

Luke’s version of Jesus in Gethsemane adds this: **“When he [Jesus] goes up from prayer, he came to the disciples and found them sleeping because of grief”** (Luke 22:45). Perhaps this grief is that early definition of sloth: depression and joylessness. Like Peter, James, and John, we stand guilty as charged – guilty of apathy, sloth, joylessness, sleeping on the job. Over against our faithlessness, Jesus does not swerve from the path before him. Following his agony in the garden, Jesus goes to the cross and dies there for our sin – for the wound of apathy and everything else separates us from that full and abundant life God would have for his children. Over against our apathy, we find in Jesus the fulfillment of the psalmist’s prayer: **“You have turned my mourning into dancing; you have taken off my sackcloth and clothed me with joy... O Lord my God, I will give thanks to you forever”** (Psalm 30:11-12). Thanks be to God. Amen.

