

The Fourth Week of Lent • March 25, 2009

St. John's Lutheran Church, Alexandria, VA

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Matthew 27:27-31

"The Wound of Mockery"

Look at this man! They say he thinks he is a king. Some king. Just some lowly Galilean with delusions of grandeur – nothing like a real king. He doesn't have a people, an army. Everyone that had followed him has left him; even the so-called leaders of his people want to see him dead. "The King of the Jews," indeed! Let's see what we can do about that. A king should be dressed to fit the part – take his clothes off. Someone find a cloak... that one... scarlet, very appropriate... put it on him. Not bad. But a king is *powerful*, too. Where can we find a scepter fitting for this king, to demonstrate his might? A reed – perfect! – put that in his right hand. Much more a king, now. But something is still missing... what do we need to complete this picture? A crown! What king doesn't have a crown, a symbol of his glory? If this man is greater than that Herod character, we need to find him something fitting. Let's just weave some of these thorns together... there it is! Now he's properly adorned. Hail, King of the Jews! Look at this man and see what the world thinks of him!

Mockery: placing oneself above someone else by putting them down, judging them for their behavior, appearance, standing, or whatever else one finds contemptible. The Roman soldiers had heard tell about this Jesus. He'd been accused of some kind of heresy by the Jewish leaders and brought before the governor. The crowd wanted him crucified. They said that he claimed to be the Messiah, some kind of king. Jesus didn't look anything like the kings these soldiers had known. And so they decided to put this upstart Jewish man in his place. They made sport of Jesus, spitting on him and beating him, letting him feel their contempt for him in their words and their blows. Over a hundred soldiers gathered round, getting their turn at this King of the Jews.

All throughout this mockery, Jesus did nothing to fight back, like a sheep before its shearers. He took the soldiers' insults and abuse and did nothing to stop it. He allowed all this to continue when he could have walked away from it all. But why? Why would the Son of God endure this travesty of justice and the mockery of these Romans? He did it for *them*. He suffered such grief and shame and scorn to make amends for the same. Acting out of a great pity and love for these soldiers and for all like them, Jesus set his face to Jerusalem, mindful of the agony he would endure at the hands of very people he came to save.

But when have we been guilty of what those Roman soldiers were doing? When have we ever actually looked down on someone else and treated them badly? Would someone's appearance or behavior – or anything that makes them different from us – make us think less of them? Would we ever make fun of someone that was vulnerable, ganging up on them with the rest of the crowd, casting insults at them? Would we judge other people and do hurtful things to them to put them "in their place?" Would we ever be guilty of mockery?

The same eyes that patiently looked on the faces of the soldiers that mocked the King of the Jews now look on us, and they now show us the same pity and love demonstrated on that Good Friday morning. Acknowledging our guilt, our mockery, we look to Jesus for forgiveness.

Look at this man! The same man that the Roman soldiers saw fit to judge as less than themselves is the one who is Judge over all. Scarlet and purple are majestic colors, but even a cloak made of the finest fabrics and the richest dyes will fail to convey the majesty of the Lord of Life – even the beauty of the lilies which robe the fields, which outshine great King Solomon's splendor, cannot fully meet the magnificence he is due. His hand holds the scepter of authority and righteousness that is rightfully his; he wields the power to pardon, to forgive the guilty, to make all things new. On his head is the golden crown of the victor: God's anointed, who has defeated death. This is the Jesus who came to live, to suffer, to bear the wound of mockery, and to die for me and for you. This is the Jesus who rose again from the dead, who now reigns as our Lord and Savior. Look at this man. Look at this King.

Amen.