

Beloved Congregation of Lord and Savior Jesus Christ,

It has been said that we live in a day and age when people are no longer willing to suffer anything. It seems today that everyone thinks it is their God given right to have everything that they want. Why can't every man drive a new car or a nice county home? It has been proven that many students today demand that they be given "A's" even though they have done nothing to earn them. We do not like to struggle or to feel pain and many of us simply refuse to suffer anymore.

Has the church fallen into such thinking? What will we give up for the glory of God? We in one sense have a lot that might have to be given up. We have freedom, wealth and prosperity 繁华 in this good country to live in. But what would we be willing to give up? Today there are many who in the name of Christ who tell us that God does not demand of His people any suffering at all. God does not demand that you undergo a painful existence, rather He will pave the way to riches and happiness if you but believe He can do these things. All the negative in your life is because of Satan they will you. And yet Paul wrote to Timothy, whoever wants to live a godly life will be persecuted (2 Timothy 3:12)

We Christians know better because we know the Word of God and the Word made flesh. We confess it as we find it spelled out for us in the catechism 要理问答. Sin brought misery into this world and part of misery is suffering. Suffering due to disease, mental problems, sadness, stress, drought floods and war are in fact a part of this world ravaged 破坏 by sin. In fact the penalty for sin is death and that brought with it suffering. There is temporal suffering and eternal suffering. And for many who find suffering intolerable here in this life without Christ and hope in the world, there will be the shock of the place of eternal torment, where worm does not die and the fire is never quenched 熄灭, the place of eternal suffering. Therefore ought the church confess a Word of damnation to suffering and worse suffering?

In a sense we do confess damnation and suffering but understanding the suffering of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ we are drawn again to the level of His suffering that was demanded of Him and what is demanded from us at times. Does it really compare? In understanding His suffering it may be that we may drink more deeply the healing medicine of God's mercy shown unto us forgiven sinners for the sake of Christ who did not turn away from suffering. Christ does not demand anything without a cost. It is because He has paid the cost for our sins by His tremendous suffering that we have been purchased by Him unto eternal life. For this reason we call Him Lord!

Can anyone imagine the suffering of Christ? All suffering was put upon Him. He suffered body and soul, not only in the last week of His life, but His entire life was a sacrifice for our sin. This afternoon we hear the Gospel of the cross. I bring it to you under the theme:

Christ Suffered to Grant Us Forgiveness of Sins:

1. Covenant Curse 2. Covenant Condemnation 3. Covenant Comfort

Covenant Condemnation What do you mean when you confess that Christ suffered? It is easy for us to answer that in terms of Good Friday. There we see the extreme suffering of Jesus Christ. There we behold the horrors of the cross. There we see the blood flowing down his back ripped by the Roman scourge 灾祸. There we see Him stumble as struggles to carry His cross finally unable to go one any further. There we see the nails driven into His hands and His feet. They tilt the cross upright; neither in heaven nor on earth He hangs suspended between the two. His chest heaves 此起彼伏 and his diaphragm 隔膜 labors struggling for breath. The sun is blocked and in the darkness He hangs. They gamble for His clothes and ridicule Him.

Why do you confess that he suffered? Because He suffered and by His stripes we are healed (Isaiah 53) that whole chapter of Isaiah predicts the suffering that our Lord Jesus Christ underwent for our infirmities. Why do we confess that He suffered? Because the Bible tells us so. And that last week of His life was more than any human could ever bear. So the catechism instructs us:

Q15. What kind of mediator and deliverer must we seek?

A. One who is a true and righteous man, and yet more powerful than all creatures; that is, one who is at the same time true God.

But lest we become too narrow in our view of Christ's suffering the catechism shows us from the Word of God that Christ had always suffered. His whole life was one of suffering. It is not as if He lived some sort of charmed perfect life until that last week of His life! Christ's lifetime on earth was one of constantly intensified suffering. As we read in Isaiah 53, "He took upon Himself our transgressions and infirmities." Not just when He went to the cross did He know pain but at moment of conception and the time His birth, His was a time of burden and suffering that we might live.

But what shall we say then? His whole life. Was His life so different than ours in that respect? He suffered ridicule. So do we. He suffered rejection and so do we. But can we really say that we know His frustration 挫败? What was it like to walk on an earth filled with sin. He loved the Father with a perfect love. He hated sin and sin was all around Him. In the minds of men, their imagination, their hearts, their words and deeds were wicked and offensive to the Father He so deeply loved. Arrogant Pharisees who thought that they knew God's Word better than the Son of God. He led for three years dull disciples slow to understand. He suffered a mother who exerted her authority at a wedding with no regard to her Son's Father given service. He had to abide another mother asking for special privileges for sins James and John. Do we know that kind of anguish 痛苦? In such anguish could we exhibit His patience?

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 53 and Lord's Day 15: He Suffered

What of His suffering in the wilderness right after the Father called Him, My beloved Son with whom I am well pleased?" Tempted, hungry He went it alone against Satan. Adam and Eve had the Garden and harmony, food and drink; He has the wilderness and brokenness all around Him as the Evil One takes His shots against the fasting Lord. He never buckled, but weak in His human flesh the angels came to His aid. Do you know such suffering?

He walked into His Father's house and there they were buying and selling. There the business people were over-charging the poor so that they profited from the poor's need to buy the sacrificial 牺牲 animals with the temple coin. The House of God became a den of thieves. He suffered. No one else there did with Him. Would you? Do you suffer when you see evil the church, in the home and all around you? Do you suffer in your soul at all the offence against you heavenly Father? In his suffering for the glory of the Father He drove the wicked out of the temple with a whip.

Yes and He suffered when prayed there in the Garden. The anguish of what awaited Him caused him to ask the question, "To suffer or not to suffer?" He knew what had to be done. He was the suffering servant and he was the one whom Isaiah saw and prophesied of. And He went willingly to force the issue with the Pharisees. Openly and courageously. He suffered. Praise be to God that the children of God do not need to know this suffering. It is enough because of His suffering that we know about such suffering. And knowing such suffering we will not suffer anything that will drive us from love for this Jesus! What love this Jesus shows to poor wretched sinners like us. Why one will hardly die for a good man but He suffered and died for us while were yet sinners! (Romans 5:6-7) And when we add to all of that that He became a curse before God and also rejected and despised as being cursed by God's people we start to see the totality of His suffering and wince. Was it horrible suffering? Yes, see from His hands, His head and His feet, sorrow and love flowed mingled down. But why such horrible suffering?

Covenant Condemnation It is always amazing that so many love to have Christmas cards with Jesus in the manger, or to see pictures or re enactments of it. For many even today the reading of Luke's account of the Christmas event is still a traditional part of the family Christmas celebration. But how many read the events of Jesus life after His birth? Do we really understand the humiliation 羞辱 of that birth. How many ask any more "Why did the Son of God become a baby? Why did He undergo such punishment? Why did He become a curse before God." Do any even realize that His birth was the beginning of that life to of the curse of our sins upon that child? Does anyone care anymore that He was the man of sorrows acquainted with grief? Even in the church here in Canada there does not seem a real heartfelt desire to come to grips with these things anymore. Better that we don't talk about it too much, it is really just too painful to talk about! Soon the covenant people's understanding of the depths and the riches of the mercy of God are lost because the passion of Lord Jesus Christ is no longer counted and recounted among us. To see His suffering is to see our own sin. Why did He have to suffer? That we might be healed says Isaiah. Why did He have to become a curse for us to die on the tree? For our iniquity says Isaiah. For God had said to Adam in the day you eat of the fruit, that is, in the day you sin you will surely die. (Genesis 2:17). And though the sting of eternal death was suspended, One had to bear the pain. And so Christ suffered. He was pierced 刺穿 for our transgressions and he was crushed for iniquity and against him was the chastisement 惩罚 that brought us peace. It was the demands of the covenant that God had made with Adam. Jesus died as the surety of the covenant of grace 恩典的契约, by dying under the weight of the covenant of works 工作的契约 that all things might be restored to God. It compels us to sing, "Ah, dearest Jesus how hast Thou offended? Alas it was my treason that hath undone thee." Jesus suffered, the Christian knows that the ransom for his sin demanded such before the sight of heaven. So the catechism states, "in order that by His suffering, as the only atoning sacrifice, He might redeem our body and soul from everlasting damnation, and obtain for us the grace of God, righteousness and eternal life." We are reminded of those words of comfort from Heidelberg Catechism Lord's Day 1: question and answer 1: "He has fully paid for all my sins with His precious blood, and has set me free from all the power of the devil."

We confess God's Word that teaches that it was Jesus who was condemned to die not due to anything He had done but to "make many to be accounted righteous." (Isaiah 53:11) He came to undo what Adam had done. He took upon Himself our sins and took them from the sight of the Lord by suffering even unto death on the cross.

These sins had already been condemned in the eyes of God. Adam had already been pronounced guilty. God grants grace not to the righteous, they do not need it, but to the guilty. The suffering of Christ was then a legal judgment 法律上的审判 by God placed upon Him. He did that God might be praised and that we might have salvation. He did it because God rejects sin and curses it. Though Jesus walked with God, the Father, the Son of God was treated as one who was despised and rejected not only of God but also of men.

Covenant condemnation meant also that God's people also rejected Him. We must not forget that Jesus came as the Word made flesh to his own and his own did not receive him. He was despised and rejected! (John 1:11) Let us not forget that Jesus died the death of curse and cursed He was to the Jews. But they had not the legal means to hang Him from a tree. They would have much rather stoned him. No if Jesus was to be hung on a tree as a curse then they needed Rome's help for that. The judgment of Pilate is important here. God's people then and in fact all men rejected and despised and considered Him cursed. What they see upon Him is their own sin. And sin is ugly. The question they and we need to ask is why did He have to be crucified? And the answer comes clearly via Isaiah 53 that we might be saved, that the curse of God upon our sins might be taken away from us and that we may stand before God in Christ's righteousness as those declared 公告 innocent in the blood of Christ.

But we also confess that He was crucified under the condemnation of Pontius Pilate! This too is part of the condemnation demanded by God as part of the covenant He had made with Adam. Jesus had to be executed under the law by one with authority to

do that. Therefore Jesus was condemned under Pilate and not Caiaphas. Caiaphas did not have the power to execute Jesus. Pilate as was befitting his position gave Jesus due process of the law. After due process of the law and words from his wife as to Jesus' innocence he still condemned Jesus to even more horrible suffering than He had already experienced. Pilate washing his hands of his own guilt makes the declaration that though Jesus is in his eyes without sin still he decides to hand him over any ways. He even tried to get out of the whole predicament 困境 by offering Barabbas. But the people hated Jesus, they had rejected Him. God by the hand of Pilate, uses Pilate's lack of courage to hand Jesus over to this rejection. Jesus was then condemned of God, cursed to hell for our sin. His condemnation came as a judgment of guilt though we deserved such condemnation and He didn't He is the One condemned. God by the hand of official Pilate declares his Son at once innocent and yet guilty of our sins. He declares His Son as worthy 配得的 to die for the unworthy 不配得的. Pilate meant it for evil but God used it for our good. Yes all things work for the good of those who love God in Christ Jesus! And lest we forget, one day Pilate will be publicly judged by Christ. What will he say then?

Truly remarkable! Truly wonderful! Christian do you hate it that Jesus suffered horribly for your sins? Do you hate that His was the cry to the father, "Why have you forsaken me?" Then hate your sin and flee from it. For it brings no God, it is judged by God as horrible and the price paid was horrible. You cannot today say my look what Jesus did for me and then continue in your sinful ways. But if you love Him then we must live for Him and before Him. For see the benefits of His suffering for us.

Covenant Comfort: Rather harsh all this talk about pain and violence, suffering and hardship. What is this then, that we can be made ready for the week of pain and suffering. Was Marx 马克思 correct all this is nothing but an opiate 鸦片 for the masses 群众 so we can talk you into accepting your suffering? Don't we need to hear joyful things? This isn't all that joyful. Well, that's true on the surface of it. It is all rather tragic 悲惨. The previous Lord's Day of the catechism we confess the little baby but now to dig so deep? Better it was to remain ignorant wasn't it?

No it isn't the impetus to sing and dance in the aisles. But there is great joy for us for in this message of "He suffered under Pontius Pilate" is the message of hope for the Christian who can confess: "I do not suffer so and I am not asked to either." Christ has won for me my salvation. what mercy, what a savior what an expression of God! And this is given to me by faith given to me by God that these things may be mine. It is not simply that Christ suffered but that the Christian believes these things by the gifting of the Holy Spirit and such a confession makes all the difference in his life. The Christian experiences joy and when he think that each sin ever committed deserved hell of itself; how long is eternity: how many sins, individual acts of disobedience do we even know about, don't know about and yet it is forgiven! For this He came to give us eternal life that we might not leave here today in a Good Friday frame of mind but in an Easter frame of mind.

We are so very easily Good Friday people. We love to talk about our suffering and how hard it is. Until you go to the hospital and visit the sick. Or you go to the prison cell and see life behind those walls. Or you see those who have lived under the tyranny 暴政 of communism 共产主义 or hear the news of the slaughter of Christian in Africa, China or the Middle East. We can so easily be downers. But rejoice says Paul. Peter says, "In this (inheritance kept for you- life eternal) you rejoice though now for a little while you have grieved by all kinds of trials (that written to persecuted Christians). Are we not sinners? Do we not deserve the trials and troubles we get. And yet even those hardships we get are used by God for our good and benefit for the building of our faith. Look to Jesus congregation next time you feel low and tired. Let us also not feel too sorry for ourselves either. Let us come to church in joy for what Christ has done that in joy we may be built up in joy. Too let us not be too distracted 分神 by others and church problems and issuers. Let us focus in Christ's obedience and suffering for us and there is all the motivation and example of godliness you will need. Read His Word He gave that also for you.

What comfort we see there in the cross. it is the good news of the cross. Christ died for His people. And the catechism teaches us to confess that Christ suffered for me, the one who believes in God almighty maker of heaven and earth, in the Son the redeemer and the Spirit the sanctifier 成圣者. Christ's rejection and condemnation means that we have gained the Father's favor. Christ's condemnation means that we have been acquitted and Christ's death means that we have eternal life. It was sad and terrible what He underwent for us make Himself lowly to die for the lowly. But He has done this also for our exaltation! By His work we have obtained the grace of God. Let us not complain about suffering too much. Let us rather consider it pure joy to live for Christ who died for us. We leave the last words for Isaiah:

Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the

transgressors. 他受了生命之苦以后, 必看见光明, 并且心满意足; 我的义仆必使许多人因认识他而得称为义, 他也必背负他们的罪孽。所以, 我要使他与伟大的人同分, 他必与强盛的均分战利品, 因为他把自己的生命倾到, 以致于死, 他被列在罪孽之中, 却担当了多人的罪, 又为罪孽代求。

Amen.