

Sacred Head, Now Wounded: Sticks and Stones...and Words...Hurt!

A sermon based on Matthew 27:27-31.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

A roast...have you ever been part of one before? It's a banquet to honor a person at which the honoree is subjected to good-natured ribbing and ridicule. These roasts seemed to have gained some popularity in recent years, after MTV started having these celebrity roasts on TV.

I actually got to do one, sort of, when the pastor I vicared under took a call shortly after I finished my year with him. The congregation had a farewell dinner for him and asked me to say a few words. And I thought I would take my precious opportunity to give him his comeuppance, his punishment (just kidding), and do a fun roast of him. So, in quoting Oscar Martinez, one of the characters from both of our favorite TV show, *The Office*, in an episode where the employees roast their boss, I told Pastor Strutz, "I consider myself a good person...but I'm gonna make [you] cry."

Now, of course, it was clean, good-natured humor...in that case. But what happens when the ridicule goes too far? When it goes from good-natured humor to blatant, disrespectful, malicious mockery, like, maybe what you've seen or heard about for our President...blow-up dolls highlighting some not-so-great features, music videos and lyrics showing and talking about shooting him (or a Trump clown), or the racist things said about his wife, or the insensitive and false things said about his son and others in his family. Is that ever appropriate?

Today, in our verses, a different "leader" was being mocked. He had claimed to be God; he asserted before Pilate that he indeed was a king. So, Pilate's soldiers decided to have a little fun with Jesus. But this wasn't fun, like dress up little brother in a dress and put some makeup on him "fun." This wasn't a roast, a good natured ribbing...for Jesus, it wasn't.

Now, for the soldiers, they thought it was hysterical—this Galilean peasant pretending to be a king. It cracked them up. They decided to have some fun with His apparent delusion, so the soldiers began by taking away His clothes. He had to stand there naked as they mocked Him. Then they found a beautiful scarlet robe and put that around His shoulders. "There. Now He is beginning to look kingly," they joked with each other. "But you know what's missing? We need a crown!"

And so one of them thinks up a crown for this peasant king from Galilee, a crown to teach Him a thing or two about His silly daydreams, a crown of entwining thorns. They smash the crown down on His head, and the thorns bite and the blood pours. And still He stands there. His response is not what they had hoped for. He is silent to the taunts, the mockery, the jeers.

Someone comes up with another missing item—a king needs a scepter. They scrounge around and find a reed, and they make His right hand take it. They step back to admire the finished product: blood running down His face from the thorns cruelly piercing His head, His naked body barely covered with the red scarlet robe, and a flimsy reed that flops this way and that in His hand. "Behold, the man who would be king," they say.

Laughing with scorn, they fall on their knees. "Oh, Your majesty!" they cry. "Hail! King of the Jews!" But still He looks on in silence, as their mockery turns vicious. He will not play along in their game, so He will

pay. They begin to spit on Him to show their utter contempt of this deluded upstart. They take His scepter and whip His head with the reed. "Some scepter. Some rule. Some kingdom. You are nothing, and You are about to die, and it will not be easy. Wait and see, King of the Jews."

And there, worse than the beating and being dressed up in the royal garb were the barbs...the insults that came from the soldiers...and then a short time later, from the crowd at the cross.

Would you agree? I'm sure you've heard the phrase, "Sticks and stone may break my bones but words will never hurt me." You've probably said it at one time as well. Is that true, though?

In all the wounds we've looked at for Jesus over these weeks in Lent, it's been the words that caused him pain, right? The wounds of betrayal and denial – **"Surely not I, Lord?"** **"I will never disown you...I will never fall away from you."** But the lie, **"I don't know the man!"**

The wound of apathy, the words of encouragement not spoken to support Jesus in his darkest hours...the words Jesus heard in their laziness, "Jesus, we don't really care about you."

And now, the mockery, **"Hail, king of the Jews!"** And then, a short time later, **"He saved others, but he can't save himself."** **"Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God."** Words meant to deeply wound and hurt and break and bend the spirit of an innocent man...far more pain than sticks and stones.

Friends, I think you'd agree. Words hurt.

A teacher once used two apples to teach her class a lesson about the impact of words. Unbeknownst to the class, the teacher had repeatedly dropped one of the apples on the floor before class, but it still looked just like the other apple. Then, while they were sitting there, the teacher heaped insults on that apple, "You're worthless. No one likes you. You're ugly. Your stem is too short. You probably taste disgusting." And she had the students do the same, while they showered the other apple with praise and compliments. Then she cut open both apples, and they saw how their words, their mockery, "impacted" one apple, bruised all other.

Friends, words hurt. Now, Jesus, he was bruised and beaten on the outside...but he was just as bruised and beaten on the inside...the wound of mockery. Ok, I know, we could never cut Jesus open and see how bad the wound inside was, but we know those words wounded Jesus because we've seen and know how words wound and hurt us.

Right? Not words that might offend us, but words that truly hurt and cut us. Degrading comments about our physical features, sexual jokes, the rumors which are just that, rumors, that circle back to us, being talked down to or belittled or unfairly criticized...you know what it's like to be mocked. It hurts.

Have we turned the tables and added to Jesus' wound of mockery? What of our words mock Jesus? God's Word tells us, **"Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths...Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption."**

What words? Well, for starters, how many hammers are in hell? How many inanimate objects or even people have you asked Jesus to damn to hell?

The "Oh, my God" that slips from your lips when you're startled...or maybe you've softened it to "Oh, my gosh," as if that's somehow better and more appropriate, when it's really not.

The needless “I swear to God” or maybe shortened to “I swear” when you really want someone to know you’re telling the truth.

And of course, we can add the degrading comments about others’ physical features, the sexual jokes, spreading rumors that are just that, rumors, talking down to or belittling or unfairly criticizing others...because that all qualifies as unwholesome talk, too, and that grieves the Holy Spirit...and hurts Jesus.

Why do we do that? Have you ever stopped to think about that? Why don’t we filter what comes out of our mouths more? We might make excuses...I don’t really mean that, it’s just some good-natured ribbing, a roast, if you will...come on, that person just has to have big shoulders.

But intentional or not, mean-spirited or not, any unwholesome talk grieves the Holy Spirit and mocks Jesus because that’s not who he made you and me to be. You think our words, our mockery of Jesus hurts more than that of Jesus’ enemies? You are his friend. You are his brother/sister. And those words ridicule Jesus and the name he has lovingly placed on us.

And we deserve to be ridiculed by Jesus...to be roasted by Jesus, which could be as simple as him hanging out all our dirty laundry and sins and saying to us on Judgment Day, **“I don’t know you.”** We deserve to roast in hell, to suffer the fiery wrath of God and the unquenchable and unending fires of eternal punishment.

Words hurt. Thankfully, it took one word from Jesus to hurt and destroy our hurtful words, all our sin, Satan, even death itself. As the soldiers dressed him up, as they mocked him, as the crowds passing by the cross heaped insults on him, Jesus remained silent. But there, on Mt. Calvary, it took sticks and stones and one word...to heal us.

Look into His eyes, and you will see it—a depth of pity and a fountain of love that knows no end. It’s a mere human trait—common to all of fallen humanity—to love your friends and to seek to do them good. But to love your enemies, to have nothing but pity and compassion for those who taunt and jeer at you and who are preparing to kill you—that’s the mark of our heavenly Friend, Jesus.

To ponder his Passion is to remember how a single thought from Jesus could have undone all those who sought His death, a single thought could have destroyed us all. But, as Luther writes in one of his hymns, it was instead **“one little word [that] fell him (that destroyed Satan, sin, death)”** ...one little word that healed us. And that word? ***Tetelestai...Finished!***

How did that one word heal us? It took sticks...rather, a tree, the cross, where Jesus offered himself as the sacrifice for our sins. Jesus, the perfect, innocent, sinless Son of God took our disease of sin and died our death so his righteousness and innocence could be ours...so we could be clean...healed. It took stones...the grave...not that Jesus stayed there, but that the stone and that tomb could not keep him in, as Jesus rose to life, triumphant over death...that victory ours.

And that one word, tetelestai (finished) uttered from the cross, erased every wound of mockery we’ve ever inflicted on Jesus...every hurt word and all the unwholesome talk we’ve ever grieved him with, along with every sin. Gone, paid for in full.

Sticks and stones and words (including ours) hurt Jesus. But sticks and stones and one word from him healed us. That is who Jesus is. He rules in love unconquerable by hate. And we are saved. And our lives and our attitudes and our mouths and our words are changed...for him.

Jesus was stripped, so our sinful nakedness might be clothed in the bright robe of His righteousness. He wore a crown of thorns, so we will wear a royal diadem...the crown of eternal life. He was beaten and mocked, so we would be welcomed and treasured by God forever.

Friends, Jesus walked that way—that suffering way—in kingly fashion (notice the irony of the soldiers' mockery there!). None of that could take from Him His majesty, His glory, His peace. He performed every act of His Passion in burning love for the us so we might be healed. He lay down His life so we would live in him and with him.

So, behold, your King! See—beneath the spit, the blood, the blows—the eyes that look at you with tender compassion and cry out: “For you, child. For love of you. That you might live with Me forever.” Tetelestai. Finished. Amen.