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“My God Died – Why Believe?”

Mark 15

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Five succinct words (“Crucified, died, and was buried”). Five concise words that make Christianity different from any other world religion. These five words – from the Creed and, really, from the Bible -- are precisely what make our Christian faith, our Christ-centered faith, completely unlike any other belief system.

Buddhism lays out a path of spiritual **discipline** for the believer to climb to a state of nirvana. Hinduism talks of the believer worshipping many gods, and being reincarnated multiple times, to achieve a state of ultimate **consciousness**. Islam encourages the believer’s **submission** to God in order to qualify for the afterlife. Judaism teaches the believer to live by the Law of God, and to make his/her own **atonement** for sins. Scientology requires the believer to pay lots of **money** and take lots of special classes in order to learn how to become divine.

But Christianity teaches that God came down to our level. God became one of us. Our God took on human flesh, and became a man. Jesus of Nazareth is truly human, born of the virgin Mary; but he is also true God, conceived by the Holy Spirit. So when Jesus died on a cross, he was giving up his divine/human life as the ultimate sacrifice, paying for our sins, and giving us the free gift of salvation. It was the Son of God – God himself – who was “Crucified, died, and was buried.”

So our Christian faith is not focused so much on what we can do to save ourselves. It’s centered on what God has already done in Christ Jesus to save us. Those five little

words from the Creed, then, sum up what was the most momentous, stupefying, world-changing event in all of history. Our God was “Crucified, died, and was buried.” And that’s what makes Christianity absolutely unique – with all due respect -- among all the religions of the world.

This past week, I read those words from Mark chapter 15 about Christ’s death a number of times. The writer of the third Gospel, St. Mark, has an unusual way of telling a story, doesn’t he? Mark is fast-moving, no-nonsense, and sparse in his narrative. He just lays it out: “This happened, and this happened, and this happened, and this happened.” It struck me, as I read the story this week, that Mark is not giving me all sorts of details about someone else’s story. Mark wants me to be part of this story. This is the story of how my God died.

Mark challenges me to watch (“the soldiers led him away inside the palace”), to observe (“they clothed him in a purple cloak”), to listen (“they began to salute him, ‘Hail, King of the Jews!’”). Mark invites you, too, to join him in cringing (“they were striking his head with a reed and spitting on him”), in feeling shame (“those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads”), in experiencing terror (“there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour”). Mark calls all of us to hear the dying voice of Jesus (“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”), to see his final moments (“Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed his last”), to agonize at his passing (“laid him in a tomb that had been cut out of the rock”).

It’s the horrible, wonderful story of how *my* God died. This is the very essence of our religion. It’s the cornerstone of our identity as Christian believers. Why believe? The story of Christ’s crucifixion, death, and burial – and these five words from the Creed – they are for me! They are about me, as a

sinner who could never find my way to God by my own devices! These words, and the glorious truth they contain, have already shaped me, and they will determine my eternal destiny. These five little words tell the greatest story ever told; and each one of us needs to see that we are a part of that story. Each of us needs to say, “My God died,” and to understand a thing or two about what that awesome statement means for our daily living.

When I say, “Crucified, died, and was buried,” I need to remember, first, that Jesus didn’t die for just some of my sins. He died for **all** my sins! When God forgives a repentant sinner who has faith in Jesus, he forgives every bit, every fragment, of our sin. We can live freely and joyfully, then, not crippled by guilt, not ceaselessly striving to somehow be good enough. You and I can live today secure in the knowledge that our sins are 100% forgiven by God.

What does that mean for you? Is there some past episode in your life that you need to let go of? Some foolish choice, some tragic mistake, you’ve been carrying around as a heavy burden? Some sense of insecurity about your standing with God? Friend, you’re forgiven! Jesus paid it all! The life of the pure and perfect Son of God is more than payment enough for whatever you’ve done. Say it with me: “Crucified, died, and was buried ... for **all** my sins.” Now let those words affect the way you look at yourself, the way you look at God, the way you live.

And here’s one thing more. When we say, “Crucified, died, and was buried,” we need to remember that the Lord didn’t only die for us. He died for **all** people! Jesus died for all the world! For all sinners!

There’s nothing so very special about us, you know. God doesn’t only care about those of us who go to church, and

wear a cross around our neck, and know how to sing the good old Lutheran hymns in four-part harmony.

God sent his Son to pay for all the world's sins. Christ made a once-and-for-all payment. Theologians call this "objective justification." Christ's sacrifice covered all sins of all people of all times and all places.

So the way we treat people, and the way we regard others who are not just like us, needs to change. God has love for all people, and so should we. God has tolerance and compassion for everyone, and so should we.

Is there someone you've been struggling to love? Someone you've had a hard time forgiving? Someone you've been ignoring, mistreating, or rejecting? I urge you today to take these five words to heart. Say this one with me aloud: "Crucified, died, and was buried ... for all people." And let those words reshape your hearts and soften your attitudes toward others.

Five succinct words. Why believe? These words make Christianity different from any other religion. And these words are meant to make a difference in your life today. In the name of our Savior Jesus, who was crucified, died, and was buried. Amen.