

Sunday, March 30, 2025    Sunday Morning Worship Sermon

"The Three Crosses "    Pastor Takaaki Inoue

Isaiah 52:13~53:6, Luke 23:32~43

### ❶ 【The Mystery of Christ's Suffering】

Pilate erected three crosses on the hill of Golgotha. With Jesus at the center, two criminals were crucified, one on the right and the other on the left. At that time, Jesus prayed to God the Father. "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." The first time I heard this prayer was when I was hiding in my house after running away from the Unification Society. When I read this prayer, I thought, "This one who forgives those who kill him is real." And I was given the courage to think that I, who had betrayed God and run away, might be forgiven. In the Unification Society, we were taught that Jesus was crucified because he failed to save, but it didn't seem like a failure to me. The lawmakers scoffed and said, "You have saved others, and if you are God's Messiah and chosen, save yourself." (v. 35), and the soldiers insulted him, saying, "If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself" (v. 37), and one of the criminals said, "Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us." (v. 39). They know that Jesus performed many miracles and raised the dead. These words are not only insulting, but also filled with anticipation of a miracle and anger at being betrayed. But Jesus did not come down from the cross and did not perform miracles. If Christ had not suffered on the cross, our faith would have been very different. The Lord's suffering was a voluntary suffering. "No one can take my life away from me, I will give it up myself." (John 10:18). He suffered on the cross of His own volition and chose death of His own volition. An ancient prayer reads:

●He who hung the earth upon the waters will be hung on the tree of the cross today, the king of angels will be crowned with thorns, and he who has covered the heavens with clouds will be clothed with false purple robes, and he who set Adam free in the Jordan River will be beaten on the cheek, the bridegroom of the church has been nailed with nails, and the virgin has been pierced with spears.

The Apostles' Creed dares to include the word "suffering" and "suffering" under Pontius Pilate. The Jews believe that salvation is the elimination of suffering, and the cults of this world all promise freedom from suffering. But Christianity does not promise freedom from suffering. "You have tribulations in the world, but be of good courage. I have overcome the world." (John 16:33). Suffering is something that should not exist in the world that God has created. But with the fall of man came suffering. Suffering does not go away in this world. It is

impossible in this fallen world. Therefore, God did not save us by miracles or power, but tried to save us by solidarity with suffering. "God is, ... He will always be there to help you in times of hardship." (Psalm 46:1), and in fact, Jesus suffered with us. When we are suffering, pray to Jesus. God owes us together.

## ② [The fates of the right and left robbers have been divided. Whether or not you notice love]

One of the criminals cursed Jesus, but the other said: "You don't fear God, you are being punished in the same way, and we deserve it, because we are being rewarded for what we have done. But he has done nothing wrong." (verses 40~41) and said, "Jesus, remember me when you come to your kingdom" (verses 41~42). At that time, Jesus said, "I tell you clearly, you are in paradise with me today" (verse 43). Everyone suffers. God is with us in the midst of our suffering, but in that suffering, we are divided into right and left. On the other hand, they admit their sins and enter heaven knowing the love of God, who still loves them. The other side suffers the same suffering, but does not believe in the love of God and man, blames God and man for their suffering, and shuts themselves up in the hell of resentment. I wondered why this criminal had said, "When you come to your kingdom, remember me." He said, "Your kingdom," believing that the kingdom of Christ exists, and wished to become a citizen of that kingdom. At that time, citizenship in the Roman Empire was bought for a lot of money. If the country falls, they will be sold into slavery and their families will be torn apart. If you don't have money and power, you can't live on this earth. On the other hand, how different is Christ, the king who wears the crown of thorns, from the kings of this world! He is a king full of love and forgiveness. And any person, even a criminal, will be made a citizen of that kingdom free of charge if he wishes. Christians of old adored the "kingdom of Christ" tremendously. As I gaze at the cross, I am glad that I am the servant of this king.

● "In the eyes of God, who is charity itself, it does not matter what kind of person you are or what kind of person you are, but only what kind of person you want to become." Quote from "Unknowable Clouds"

## ③ [Lose to God's love, relax your shoulders]

I think it was the pure love of Christ that changed this criminal.

● Bishop Karistos Wea wrote: "What has been accomplished? It is nothing less than the victory of suffering love, the victory of love over hate. Christ loved his men to the utmost. He created the world because of love, was born into this world as a man because of love, and took on our impaired humanity as His own because of love. Out of love, they shared our sufferings. He decided to sacrifice himself out of love and to suffer willingly in the Garden of Gethsemane. ... At

the time of the cross, the forces of darkness attack Jesus and rage. But it cannot turn Jesus' compassion for His creatures into hatred. Love repels such obstacles and continues to be love itself. The Lord's love is tested at the most difficult points, but it is not overthrown. "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not prevail over this."

"Christ continues to be love itself." What a wonderful, beautiful word! No matter what the world did, Jesus' love for humanity did not change. Only good can come out of him. Because God is love. God continues to be God, and will always be love for the world. The criminals on the right have succumbed to this love of Christ. And I think I relaxed my shoulders to bet on this love of Christ, to be loved. I think that was the words, "When you come to your kingdom, remember me." Listen to a true story.

●A 15-year-old girl came to a doctor who was also a priest, looked at the Gospel on his desk and said: "How can a supposedly well-educated person believe such nonsense?" After that, she read the Bible and became interested in it, and her life changed completely. Eventually, she contracted an incurable disease, but a letter arrived, saying, "My body is beginning to deteriorate and fail, but my heart is more alive than it has ever been, and I am beginning to feel the presence of God with joy." After a while, another letter came to me, saying, "I am now so weak that I cannot make an effort to turn to God, nor can I seek Him. It was written. Later, her husband, disgusted by the deadly disease, abandoned her. After a while I received a letter from her. "I was completely defeated, and I couldn't turn to God. But God is coming down to me."

It's okay when our power to do good runs out. So did this criminal. I can't do anything anymore. Even if I can't do anything right, Christ will come down to pick me up. Christ will take this criminal in his arms and take him to paradise. As St. Paul said, "The power of God is fully manifested in weakness" (II Corinthians 12:9). Let us boast of the love of Christ. Let us give glory and praise to God, who loves us in poverty and sinfulness.