

Good Friday  
April 15, 2022  
“Soldiers Guarding the Tomb” (Matthew 27:62-66)  
By Rev. Ed Weber

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

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, tonight’s text for this Good Friday is from our 3<sup>rd</sup> reading for tonight, Matthew 27:62-66.

**“62 On the next day, which followed the Day of Preparation, the chief priests and Pharisees gathered together to Pilate, 63 saying, “Sir, we remember, while He was still alive, how that deceiver said, ‘After three days I will rise.’ 64 Therefore command that the tomb be made secure until the third day, lest His disciples come by night and steal Him away, and say to the people, ‘He has risen from the dead.’ So, the last deception will be worse than the first.” 65 Pilate said to them, “You have a guard; go your way, make it as secure as you know how.” 66 So they went and made the tomb secure, sealing the stone and setting the guard.”**

Here ends our text.

Soldiers guarding the tomb. Our Lenten series of the lesser-known participants in the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus focuses tonight upon the guards. We thank Pastor Goetz for his preaching of this series that he composed by the Holy Spirit’s leading and some of His excellent thoughts I have included in this message.

“On the next day”...begins our text. It may seem strange that our text is not a Good Friday text but is actually a Holy Saturday text. But it certifies and confirms the very truth of what happened on Good Friday. Jesus Christ, the Son of God did die. His side was pierced. His lifeless body was taken down from the cross, wrapped and prepared for the grave and placed inside the grave. A large stone was rolled in front of the opening to close the tomb. Mary Magdalene and others were witnesses.

Though Jesus body lay at rest without decomposing, though the disciples returned to their homes observing the Sabbath day of rest, there was no rest for the wicked. Good Friday was not over for the Chief Priests. In spite of seemingly defeating their #1 enemy by killing Him on the cross, there was a narrative that still needed to be controlled – their deceitful man-made narrative that the disciples would try to

steal the body and claim a resurrection. If there is no body then the disciples would control the narrative. And they could say that their Jesus was the Messiah because He rose from the dead, making “the last deception worse than the first,” in their eyes.

The guards/soldiers, for they are called both in Matthew, were ordered to make sure that the tomb wasn't opened for at least three days. For a sealed tomb would then nullify Jesus' prophesy of His own resurrection.

Control the narrative. Show what you want people to hear and believe even if it involves bribery. Are our times any different now? Does the media not pick and choose what they want to show that fits their agenda and narrative, even if it means withholding the truth? Does the phrase “cancel culture” mean anything to you?

Why are people so shook up about Elon Musk becoming the largest shareholder of the world's fastest and most far reaching means of communication – Twitter? Worried that he might want to stop those in Twitter who are the self-appointed gatekeepers, self-appointed guardians of free speech? And when the richest man in the world, Elon Musk, offers to buy Twitter for 43 billion dollars, does that not send shock waves, earthquakes of fear into these gate keepers' hearts?

Control the narrative. There was no rest for the Chief Priests and the soldiers whether they were Roman Soldiers or Temple guards. We won't get into all of that discussion right now. The soldiers were soldiers – paid to do a job. And even when they failed to do their job, they were paid even some more to keep quiet about what really happened and spread a false narrative. The Chief Priests have the nerve to come to Pilate and call Jesus “that deceiver”. Isn't always true of the wicked, that they project their evil, their collusion, on the innocent to distract others from what they are actually doing? So Isaiah wrote,

***“But the wicked are like the tossing sea, which cannot rest, whose waves cast up mire and mud. ‘There is no peace,’ says my God, ‘for the wicked.’” (Isaiah 57:20-21)***

Guardians of the tomb. They had a simple job to do keep it closed. They had received their orders, with the approval of Pilate, to make the tomb secure as best as they knew how. These lesser-known participants in the story of Jesus' death and resurrection were just following orders.

And yet, they also have a story to tell, for they were the first witnesses of the mighty hand of God on Easter morning. They felt the earthquake, they saw an angel of God roll the stone away. They saw the countenance of this angel which was like lightning and his clothing white as snow as Matthew says in chapter 28.

And they became like dead men in fear. For the angel reflected the power of the Almighty God! Yes, they became like the dead Man that they were trying to guard. Such amazing irony! For the dead Man's narrative prevailed. And the tomb that was sealed to keep men from taking a body, was opened to reveal that it could not keep the Resurrected Man, Jesus in! The dead Man was alive and the guards were shaking like dead men!

They hadn't signed up for this. No one told them that supernatural powers, not mere human powers were going to open the tomb. When they finally came to their senses, some returned to the Chief Priests and reported what had happened.

**“11 Now while they were going, behold, some of the guard came into the city and reported to the chief priests all the things that had happened. 12 When they had assembled with the elders and consulted together, they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers, 13 saying, ‘Tell them, ‘His disciples came at night and stole Him away while we slept.’ 14 And if this comes to the governor’s ears, we will appease him and make you secure.” 15 So they took the money and did as they were instructed; and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day.” (Matthew 28:11-15)**

And yet, all this that the soldiers saw was willingly swept under the carpet for a large sum of money. Yes, it costs big bucks to control the narrative. Unfortunately, these soldiers were easily bought to conceal the truth and perpetuate a lie that the disciples had stolen the body. Of course, bribery of public officials, Border Patrol, police, mayors etc. isn't a problem anymore, right?

Even an earthquake and the appearance of an angel didn't cause these men to what was most needed for them to do - repent. They shook like dead men at the earthquake, but more tragic, their souls were dead.

We are gathered here this Good Friday to especially look at our souls – to ponder the earthquake at Jesus' death, the opening of the tombs and the people who came to life from them, the tearing of the temple veil, the earthquake that the guardians of the tomb experienced and do what the guards didn't do – repent.

Repent of our sins and trust in the true narrative of God's word that the lifeless body of the Son of God who hung on the cross died to pay for all your sins! Most likely, we won't experience an earthquake tonight. But our hearts should fear and tremble that we have not done our duty as soldiers of the cross.

As ineffective as the guards were to do their duty and guard the tomb, so ineffective have we been in guarding the law of God and keeping it perfectly. **“For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all.” James 2:10**

Make the tomb secure as best as you know how said Pilate. Yes, Pilate wasn't concerned about how well the guards did their job. Just do what you want and be done with it.

But God is most concerned about how well we guard His commandments. “Doing the best that you know how”, doesn't cut it. If it did, there wouldn't have been any need for Jesus to die in our stead.

We do the best we know how in life to guard things from getting stolen, right? We can put an extra dead bolt on the door and add video cameras. We can have a ferocious guard dog and strategically place gun safes throughout the house to defend against home invaders. Aren't the people in Ukraine doing the best they know how to guard their country from the Russian invaders? Molotov cocktails...pleas to the world for assistance...Yes, everyone does the best we know how. Sometimes it works, and sometimes it doesn't.

The guards outside the tomb thought they had it secure from any tomb raiders, but they had not taken into account the power that laid within the tomb. For no earthly guard can withstand the power of the divine hand of God! The guard best efforts were completely ineffective! They were so overwhelmed by power of God that they shook like dead men. Dead men! Inert...absolutely powerless to do what they were tasked to do.

And that my friends in Christ describes our best efforts to guard not our homes or cars from break-ins, but our hearts from the breaking in of sin! For we are tasked by God to keep His commandments – perfectly! It's not a simple task and no one has done it perfectly.

We are tasked by God to guard our lips from lying, deceiving, swearing, gossiping. And not only that, we are tasked with guarding and defending our neighbor from those who bear false witness against them, and speaking well of our neighbor.

We are tasked with guarding our hands from stealing, hurting others, killing the unborn, committing sexual immorality. But not only that, we are tasked with

guarding the weak and defenseless, the orphan, the widow, the unborn, the innocent victims of violence.

We are tasked not only to guard our lips and hands but our minds from coveting, sexual immorality, deceit, and idolatry. Not only that, but we are tasked with helping our neighbor keep what belongs to him or her.

You know, the penalty for falling asleep on the job for a Roman soldier was death. But, that, strangely enough became the actual narrative of these guards of Jesus' tomb. They agreed for a large sum of money that they had fallen asleep on the job and the disciples stole Jesus' body.

Well, there are a few holes in that story...like how did they know that the disciples did it if they were asleep? And, weren't they afraid of the penalty for falling asleep? This is one reason, some believe that the tomb guards were temple guards and not Roman guards. And of course, the Chief Priests promised that another payoff would be given to the governor to smooth things over should word of this reach his ears. No, this grand deception was just supposed to be disseminated among the Jews.

So, what is the penalty of falling asleep on the job of guarding God's commandments? Death...eternal death...condemnation to hell.

But, believers in Christ, today is called Good Friday because Jesus did die... for you. No one can be saved by keeping the law, so Jesus did just that and took your place on the cross. The black veil is the evil of your sin which Jesus carried. It is your failure to keep the law which Jesus did for you. And Jesus said, "It is finished." He paid for the world's transgressions and suffered God's wrath for them.

Hebrews 7:26-27 tells us how our sinless High Priest offered Himself on the altar of the cross.

**"26 For such a High Priest was fitting for us, who is holy, innocent, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens; 27 who does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the people's, for this He did once for all when He offered up Himself."**

Once and for all. Guards failed to guard. We have failed to guard God's commandments. But Jesus didn't fail. The holy, perfect Lamb of God became the

Captain of our salvation (Hebrews 2:10). This is the one true narrative which can never be cancelled – Jesus Christ the Savior of the world. So Paul continues,

**“Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.” (Hebrews 2:14-15)**

Blessed Good Friday to you. And because the guards could never keep the tomb sealed, we again await a joyous Easter celebration in three days! Amen.

**The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your heart and minds through Christ Jesus.” Amen. (Philippians 4:7)**