

**Isaiah 52:13-53:12 + Turn to the Lord Who Makes the Ultimate Sacrifice + Series: Turn to the Lord  
Cross of Christ Ev. Lutheran Church – Liverpool, NY + Good Friday + 30 March 2018**

***“To accept to die so the innocent can live, that is the essence of what it means to be a soldier.”***<sup>1</sup> Last Friday morning a terrorist walked into a grocery store in southern France. He wielded a gun, a knife, and some homemade bombs. After taking the lives of two people, he took a number of hostages.

Over the next couple hours, the police convinced the terrorist to free most of his hostages, but not all of them. One woman remained his hostage, and he wasn't about to set her free. So Commandant Arnaud Beltrame made a stunning offer. He laid his weapon on the ground, entered the grocery store, and exchanged himself for the woman. The terrorist set her free and took Beltrame hostage. At some point, Beltrame tried to disarm the terrorist, but in doing so, he lost his life.<sup>2</sup> That ordinary officer made the ultimate sacrifice. In death, he saved the lives of that woman and likely several others.

For his sacrifice, Beltrame was given a full military funeral and posthumously awarded the designation of Commander of the Legion of Honor—one of France's highest accolades. Hundreds lined the streets to see the hearse bearing Beltrame's casket led by the French Republican Guard. The President of France, Emmanuel Macron, spoke at his funeral. ***“To accept to die so the innocent can live, that is the essence of what it means to be a soldier.”***

Giving one's life that others might live—you can understand why that would be considered the ***“essence”*** of a soldier. We hear about it most often among the military as people sacrifice their lives in war to save their company, their buddies, or simply the person next to them. Yet such sacrifice is not just in the military. Firefighters rush into burning buildings. Police officers put themselves in harm's way. Even on rare occasions, a parent pushes a child out of the way of an oncoming vehicle or a brother protects his sister from danger. Such courage, such sacrifice is rare—and rightly praised.

Yet in those instances where someone gives up their life to save another, the person being saved is often an innocent victim in need of rescue. Beltrame didn't go into that market to exchange his life for the terrorist, but for the hostage. The rescue personnel on September 11, 2001 didn't enter the crumbling World Trade Center or Pentagon buildings to rescue terrorists, but to rescue victims. Sometimes such sacrifices are made because someone is in the wrong place at the wrong time, but rarely are willing sacrifices made for the guilty.

Now on this Good Friday evening, on an evening when our thoughts are directed to the sacrifice that Jesus made, you might equate his sacrifice to those I mentioned. After all, Jesus was willing to die that others might live, but perhaps we could say that Jesus' sacrifice was THE ultimate sacrifice.

Centuries before, Satan had entered the Garden of Eden, the home of God's holy people Adam and Eve, with a plan to ruin everything. He had planned to destroy what he hated and to wreak havoc or terrorism on God's holy creation. He had entered that garden wielding all kinds of soul-killing weapons: lies, doubts, temptations, and the most devastating weapon of all—death.

To a certain extent, the terrorist succeeded. He succeeded in ruining God's creation and corrupting the hearts and minds and lives of people. He even succeeded in turning them against both the holy God who loved them and against each other. When they fell to his lies and temptations, sin entered the world and ruined everything. Where once there was perfect health, now sickness showed up in human bodies. Where once there was perfect strength of mind, body, and spirit, now weakness could be found in every aspect of life. Where once there was holiness in words and thoughts and actions, now the rot of sin and iniquity ruined lives and eternities. Where once there was a holy walk with God perfectly reflecting his will, now there was blind wandering after whatever lust sinful natures could generate. Where once there was life, now death prevailed over every life. Before long, Satan had taken every person hostage leaving countless souls dying or dead.

With Satan, there was no negotiation. He wasn't about to give up his hostages. He couldn't wait for death to drag them away to hell, but into this broken world full of sin and death came Jesus Christ. At the right time in human history, when all the prophecies and promises had been made, when events had played out exactly as God had wanted, when nations and kingdoms and rulers were where God wanted them to be, into that broken world came Jesus Christ. Even though he knew exactly what he would face, what he would have to endure, Jesus then did something even more stunning. He laid down the full use of his divine power and entered our reality. He entered

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/28/world/europe/france-arnaud-beltrame.html>

<sup>2</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arnaud\\_Beltrame](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arnaud_Beltrame)

our world to exchange himself for us. He entered our world to set us free—and the terrorist attacked Jesus with everything he had.

From the get go, Satan tried everything he could to ruin Jesus, to destroy Jesus, to kill Jesus. He used King Herod to threaten Jesus' life as an infant. He brought all his temptation firepower to bear on Jesus out in the wilderness trying to trap Jesus when he was physically weak. He tried to use demons possessing people to discredit Jesus' identity and message. He tried to get the people of Jesus' hometown of Nazareth to push Jesus off a cliff. He turned the religious leaders—the experts on the Bible!—against Jesus. He tried to use Jesus' own disciples to turn him away from the cross. He tried to whip up all kinds of suffering hoping that Jesus couldn't overcome someone's sickness or demon possession or physical ailment or even death.

He even used the greed of one of Jesus' own disciples to betray his Lord. He turned crowds that had praised Jesus as Savior against Jesus calling for his execution. He was more than happy to make Pilate weak-willed and keep the Roman soldiers brutal. He cackled when Jesus finally died a humiliating death, but that ancient terrorist, that ancient demon is a fool beyond all others.

What Satan didn't realize is that in living and in suffering and in dying, Jesus won. Yes, Jesus suffered horribly. Yes, Jesus died painfully, but Jesus won. He set us free by making THE ultimate sacrifice. You see, what Satan failed to realize was that God had sent his Son not to accept death so the innocent could live, but to accept death so the guilty would live.

God had foretold that 700 years before through his prophet Isaiah. Through Isaiah, God pulls back the curtain and shows us what he was accomplishing through the difficult, yet holy life, the awful, yet necessary sufferings, and the humiliating, yet life-giving death of our Savior Jesus Christ. ***“He was despised and rejected by men, a man of suffering who knew what sickness was...He was despised, and we didn't value him. Yet he himself bore our sicknesses, and he carried our pains; but in turn we regarded him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced because of our rebellion, crushed because of our iniquities; punishment for our peace was on him, and we are healed by his wounds. We all went astray like sheep; we all have turned to our own way; and the LORD has punished him for the iniquity of us all...He willingly submitted to death...yet he bore the sin of many and interceded for the rebels.”***

Into this broken world walked our Savior, who had set his glory and power aside, so he could exchange his life for ours. Yes, Jesus gave up his life on the cross, but in doing so, he set us free. Jesus set us free by bearing our burdens of sickness and pain. Jesus set us free by being stricken, struck down, punished, pierced, crushed, wounded, and killed. He endured all of that so we can live, so you and I can be justified, not guilty in God's sight. Jesus made THE ultimate sacrifice by giving his life so that we who are guilty could live.

Therefore, he is exalted and worthy to be praised! Therefore, what God promised through Isaiah will come true. ***“When you make him a guilt offering, he will see his seed, he will prolong his days, and by his hand, the Lord's pleasure will be accomplished. After his anguish, he will see light and be satisfied.”*** Yes, Jesus gave his life on Friday, but resurrection comes on Sunday. Victory is certain. The terrorist cannot possibly win, because Christ has set us free. Now we have all eternity to sing his praises and hail him as our hero and King.

On this Good Friday evening, perhaps we should change what the French president said earlier this week. While accepting death so the innocent can live is the essence of a soldier, accepting death so the guilty can live is the essence of what it means to be the Savior. Christ died. We live. May the saving name of our crucified Lord be praised now and forever! Amen.