



Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church
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March 11, 2009
Midweek Lenten Worship
Matthew 27:15-26
Pastor Randy Ott

Forgive Us When We Despise Your Great Salvation!

“Let his blood be on us and our children” – you’ve heard that from the Gospel accounts of Jesus’ suffering and death before from this time before Pilate on Good Friday there in the morning. Have you ever wondered to yourself, how could they call down a curse of bloodguilt not only on themselves but on their children and on their children’s children? That’s saying a lot. Pilate, the guy that is the governor of Judea, the Roman governor, he’s convinced he’s innocent. “What crime has he committed? Why do you want me to kill him? He hasn’t done anything.” He washes his hands as a public show to them to say “I don’t think he’s worthy of death. It’s your responsibility.” And they take that responsibility, pick it up and carry it and say “Let it be not only on us, but also on our children.” Have you ever asked yourself “How could they say such a thing?”

When you think about it, the question becomes pretty obvious, doesn’t it? I’m assuming that parents love their children and they’re not going to call down a blood curse upon their children unless they don’t think they’ve done anything wrong, right? We see that and we say “how could they fight that?” How could they possibly think that in shouting “crucify him” they were doing nothing wrong? When we think about these words that I just read to you and we think about what they were expecting, we see that when Jesus prayed as those nails were being driven into his hands onto the cross, remember how he prayed “Father, forgive them. They don’t know what they are doing.” We can see how he was also talking about these people. They didn’t know exactly what they were doing. They were sinning against the Son of God most certainly. They were despising his great salvation because they had focused on promises that God had never made. That sounds kind of silly, but keep that thought in mind and we’ll come back to it in awhile because I am going to tell you that you and I do the same thing.

So when Jesus cries out “Father, forgive them,” we also can cry out “Father forgive us, because there are times when we despise your great salvation” and we see how desperately we need God to forgive us.

I said they were focusing on promises that God had made. They knew the promises of the Messiah. They heard them read in the synagogue and I’m betting that their hearts thrilled in the synagogue readings when it talked about the coming Messiah, the one who would be the deliverer. It’s all over from Genesis to Malachi. It’s all over there in the Old Testament they would have read from. A lot of times in the Book of Psalms there are two distinctly different pictures of the coming Messiah. One is as the suffering

servant. That's in Isaiah. The suffering Messiah is all over in the Psalms. You'll hear it on Good Friday, how the Messiah is depicted as "his tongue sticking to the roof of his mouth," "they can count all my bones;" all that stuff is there in the Book of Psalms. It's about the Messiah. But their ears perked up more when they heard the promises that were in the Book of Psalms and in other places in the Old Testament about the Messiah as a glorious king who would rule from shore to shore, from sea to sea. Jerusalem would be the main city on earth and the Messiah would rule over a kingdom that is eternal and that extends over the whole world. That is a promise God had made.

But what he said and what they heard were a couple of different things. Because as the people of Jesus' day gathered together in their synagogues, outside of their synagogues were all the Roman soldiers, the occupying forces. They were a backwater province of the great Roman Empire. They had been conquered. They had been deported to Babylon. They had been brought back. They had become a meeting place for armies from the north or the south to come together and fight various wars. Now the Romans had conquered everything and were ruling over everything. When they heard about a kingdom that goes from shore to shore and a powerful Messiah ruling as a king, a glorious king, they thought someone was going to get rid of the Romans. Then when they see Jesus on Palm Sunday, that would be the Sunday before what we just read, they see him in fulfillment of Zechariah 9. Zechariah 9 says, "See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey." And they look and there coming into Jerusalem is the guy that they had seen making the deaf hear, the blind see, the dead were raised to life, all the things that Isaiah said. And now here he is, the fulfillment, riding on that donkey. They ripped their cloaks off and threw them on the ground. They cut down the palm branches and spread them out. And they were shouting "Hosanna to the Son of David" because in their mind they have to be thinking "This is it! This is the fulfillment of all those prophecies. The Romans are about to get theirs. Oh happy day!"

They saw him on Tuesday teaching in the temple courtyards and the Herodians, those who supported the Romans, and the Pharisees, those who hated the Romans, had both ganged up to trip him up. His authority, his teaching was so powerful that they couldn't trip him up. The Messiah was supposed to be a powerful teacher. They see it again. "Oh happy day! This is it!" And now here is this crowd and they come together again and what do they see in Jesus? Think of what they are seeing now. He's wearing a crown, right? A crown of thorns made to mock and taunt him by the Roman soldiers, right? A crown of woven thorns jammed on his head so that the blood is trickling down his face. The soldiers had put a soldier's cloak on him like it was his royal robe. He had been beaten and bloodied and the Romans are laughing at him.

Put yourself in their sandals. You were expecting this guy to get rid of the Romans. You are expecting him to conquer the Romans. Now, what do your eyes see in front of you? The Romans had conquered him. That's got to be what your eyes are telling you, right? And then you have the Pharisees and the chief priests and the elders. It says they were going around the people and saying "this is the guy you thought was going to get rid of the Romans? We told you that you shouldn't have listened to him. You

should have listened to us. Now what you need to do is shout 'crucify him'." They were buzzing around them like little bees planting that in their heads. And what were their eyes telling them? Their eyes were telling them the chief priests and the elders of the law were right. He's not getting rid of the Romans. The Romans have put him under their heel and they are grinding him into the dust. "We have been lied to. We have been deceived. We have been cheated." So to form "crucify him" with their lips and shout it from the bottom of their body was not a problem.

Can't you see how Satan used all of these things to do all of this? They guys had focused on a promise God had never made. He had never made a promise that would deliver them from their earthly suffering, but that's what their eyes were looking for. That's what their eyes didn't see. And that's why they despised this greater salvation God was bringing because they were looking for promises God had never made.

You and I might not have been stirred into a murderous rage and screamed against our God and wanted to see our God put to death. From the time we've been little, most of us have been hearing this story and we know why Jesus was there. We know he was being perfect in our place. We know he was carrying our sins to the cross. That's what makes it probably all the more amazing that at times you and I still despise his great salvation, because we certainly do know better. We've seen the fulfillment. Yet, do we ever in our own minds get upset with God because we feel he isn't keeping promises to us that really he hasn't made?

You and I live in a world that's corrupted by sin. Some of the certainties of living in a sinful world is there is going to be heartache, pain, sickness, death, and grief. There is going to be a lot of bad things. But somehow you and I at times in our head connect Jesus saying "all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" with meaning that "if he has all authority, he should keep all the bad stuff out of my life. If he truly had all authority, he wouldn't be letting (fill in the blank) happen to me." "I wouldn't be so worried about my job." "I wouldn't be so worried about losing this relationship." "I wouldn't be so worried about my bank account." "I wouldn't be having a doctor look at me and saying 'is there anything else I can get you' after he's given me the bad news." "I wouldn't be losing someone that's so precious to me." "If God truly did love me and if God truly did have all authority under heaven and earth, he wouldn't let this happen to me." If you and I are honest with ourselves, our sinful nature at times wants to start that pity party pretty strong. And our sinful nature wants to blame God as though he hadn't kept the promise. But in reality, God has never promised us that this life will be without suffering. He has said quite clearly, it's through much suffering we will enter the kingdom of God. That suffering serves the purpose of keeping our eyes from only focusing on what we can see in the here and now because you and I need to be reminded that there's something bigger than here and now, because we are all too prone to be engulfed in only what our eyes can see.

God wants to use these things to get us to focus on his greater salvation. He didn't come to earth and live and die in our place just to make this life better for us, although it does because we have the confidence that he is with us and will sustain us through

these things. He came to give us a greater salvation that was just the momentary life of this world. He helps us in this world, but his salvation is for something eternal. He was absolutely perfect in our place, and this is something I think is hard for us to grasp.

Think about what Jesus prayed in the garden, what we read on that insert. “Father, if it’s possible, may this hour pass from me.” Have you ever asked God to take something away from you that you are going through in your life? I know I have. And I know at times when I have, there’s a part of me in my sinful nature that is somewhere, on some level saying “God, why did you let this into my life in the first place?” I can’t say “Lord, take this away from me” without at some level sinning by saying “somehow it’s your fault God.” I don’t know about you, but I’m assuming your sinful nature makes you struggle the same way.

But here Jesus, in his perfect love, in his absolutely perfect love prays this without crossing over into sin. He perfectly trusts the Father and carries out the Father’s will because you and I can’t. He prays a couple of times, “Let this be taken away from me; if it’s possible, take this cup from me.” But he never blames God that he has to drink the cup. He never says “God, just let them go to hell. I don’t care. I’m going home.”

Satan was there just as certainly as the chief priests and the elders were there buzzing around the mob’s head. Satan was there buzzing around Jesus’ head telling him to let those guys go. “They’re all going to desert you anyhow. Why die for them? They are all going to misuse your name anyhow. They are all going to hate you anyhow at one time or another. Just let them go to hell. They made their bed, let them lie in it.” Our God doesn’t do that. Our God perfectly fulfills everything.

I can’t understand with my eyes how Jesus could do that, but my eyes of faith believe it. This is the thing that, as Christians, you and I who know better, we want to get better at – looking with our eyes of faith and not just our physical eyes. If you rely just on your physical eyes, they will deceive just like Israel’s were deceived. You look at Jesus, beaten and bloodied. Death is what he got. Death is what he went there for and death to us we think of as the ultimate defeat. It’s the end. But in Jesus’ case, his gospel of death that Paul talks about in Romans 6, his gospel of death, he dies. Yes he dies, and it appears that he has lost, that Satan has won. But he rises from the dead. He turns apparent defeat into the gospel of life that takes away our sins. This is what God does. This is who he is. He takes death and makes it life. He takes sinners like you and me who are spiritually dead and makes us spiritually alive through Word and Sacrament. Then he increases our faith so that as we go through these lousy things we are going to face in this world, we look beyond them, we look through them, and we see God. We see Jesus’ love. We see the promises he has made, and we cling to those like a drowning man clings to a life preserver.

He has promised that he is with us always to the end of the age. He has promised nothing will happen that we can’t handle with his help. So we use our eyes of faith to go beyond despising his salvation to clinging to that salvation – the salvation that we haven’t earned, the salvation that we don’t deserve, and these promises that are made

again and again to us because we need them. He loves us. He died. He rose. He changed death to life for us. He's not going to desert us as we go through difficulty in this world. He's done all of this because of his incredible grace.

Think about those truths.