



Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church  
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April 1, 2009  
Midweek Lenten Worship  
Luke 23:26-31  
Pastor Randy Ott

### **Forgive Our Misplaced Sorrow!**

During these midweek Lenten services, we've been looking at individuals, groups that were around Jesus. We looked at their sins and how Jesus' prayer as he was being nailed to the cross, "Father, forgive them," would apply to this group. Each week we sang the song we just finished singing, "Christ, By Countless Foes Surrounded." I suppose some of you here this evening think it's a bit of a stretch to take the women of Jerusalem that are crying and wailing and mourning for Jesus as he is carrying his cross and lump them in with all these other groups like Pilate and the soldiers and all these others that are clearly foes of Jesus. How in the world are these women foes of Jesus Christ? "By Countless foes surrounded," that doesn't seem to fit.

I think it's interesting to think about this and focus on it because it teaches us a great truth. We seem to always be caught up with comparisons, right? If one thing is better, the other must be worse. If one thing is bigger, the other must be less. We do that sometimes with sin, and I think that's why we don't think what these women are doing is that big of a deal compared to the guy that swung the hammer that nailed Jesus to the cross. What this reminds us is that all of our comparisons, in many ways and at many times, are really just silly.

This last week in one Bible class we talked about our vocation and the challenges that come and the different areas of life in which we serve. We talked about how sometimes we end up spending more time comparing the cross that we bear in our vocations and saying, "Mine is worse." "No, mine is worse." And we go back and forth. God has not called us ever to compare our crosses. He has told us to help carry each other's crosses. It's kind of hard to help carry someone else's cross if all you are doing is saying, "Mine is bigger." It doesn't help what it's doing.

In the same way, if we want to say there's nothing we can learn about speaking of these women as Jesus' foes, I think we miss the point also. Put yourself in their shoes. They are there wailing and crying behind him. There are a lot of people that are filled with hatred for Christ on this day. If you've ever seen the movie "The Passion of the Christ" and you've seen that depiction of Jesus' beating and if that's what his body looked like, or something worse, as he's carrying this piece of wood and he finally stumbles and can't carry it any longer so they have to grab some schmo out of the crowd and make him carry it the rest of the way – if that's what his body looked like, think of the bile and the hatred you had to have for him to continue to mock and ridicule and taunt him. Any

person that isn't filled with hatred would have looked at him and had some kind of compassion on him. Think of all the compassion that we have for animals that are mistreated. What do you think this guy looked like as he was carrying that cross after he was beaten and beaten and beaten? Anyone's heart would go out to him and these women? I don't doubt that their sorrow for what Jesus was going through was genuine. I don't doubt it at all. But if you're one of them and you're crying for him and wailing for him and carrying on as is the custom in that part of the world, a very demonstrative mourning, a very loud wailing, and then Jesus stops and turns around and looks at you and says, "Don't cry for me." What in the world would you be thinking?

He basically says to them, "You should be crying for yourself." It sounds like Jesus is teaching us there is something we can learn about this rebuke. I think it's exactly the focus of our worship this evening. Father, forgive our misplaced sorrows. Their sorrow was for him and for what his body had gone through, for what they could see, for the crucifixion they knew he was about to go through. They knew all about this. There was a group of women it said in Jerusalem that kept a fund always to buy the myrrh and the gall and the water to mix together to give to these guys. Such was their desire to see people's suffering eased. I don't doubt that they are incredibly sorrowful for what Jesus is going through.

What do you think they thought when he said "Don't cry for me. Cry for yourselves. Cry for the city around you. There is going to come a time soon when you are going to say 'Blessed is the woman that never had kids, and we wish the mountains would have fallen on us.'" Do you think they ever figured it out?

You know what Jesus was talking about. Why would he say "Don't weep for me." We know from history that within 40 years a Roman general named Titus, who would later be emperor, came in and just laid waste to the city, just destroyed it absolutely and completely. He destroyed the temple. Laid waste to the people, burned it down and if you read the account of it, it reads like a horror story if you were one of the people that was living in that city. So we might assume that Jesus is saying "Cry for yourself because soon your earthly home is going to be destroyed." But do you think, really, does an earthly home being destroyed compare? A city being destroyed, a temple being destroyed, does that compare with what Jesus was going through? I don't really think so. That's just something temporal. That's something that's not eternal.

Here Jesus is going through the very agony of hell so that he could take away our sins, so that he could endure the punishment our sins deserve. So if he says "Don't cry for me, cry for yourself," doesn't it just have to be something more than just something earthly? Isn't that a misplaced sorrow? His pain or suffering, or their later pain and suffering at the hands of Titus?

What would he be saying cry about then? What should they have been crying about that was eternal in nature, that would lead to unending torment? It has to be nothing other than their relationship to him, right? God's judgment would be poured out on Jerusalem through Titus because they had rejected the Gospel. They had rejected

Jesus. They had done this when the tree was green. He was there. The Gospel was there and being proclaimed to them day after day after day and they couldn't see it. All they could see was physical things to mourn over. So he is saying cry for yourself because God's judgment is coming on you because the tree is going to be dry. The Gospel is going to depart from you because you are rejecting it. It's one thing to be sad when something happens. It's another thing to learn the lesson from it, isn't it?

The lesson Jesus wanted these women to learn is, "Reevaluate your relationship to me because this whole city is going to suffer because as a people you are rejecting what I have come to bring to the world." It was misplaced sorrow.

Misplaced sorrow I think at times is present in our lives also. We are sinners and as sinners, one of our curses is that we say stupid things, right? We say things that are going to hurt other people, intentionally sometimes because we are so sinful, other times unintentionally, but it still hurts none the less. Think of the times you've done this. What did you feel most sorry about? How it hurt your spouse, your child, your parent, how it hurt someone else because you acted in sin? Or were you more sorrowful about how it offended your God?

That's an interesting question, isn't it? When I lay in bed at night and say "Lord forgive me for what I've done to this person," I'm often thinking more of the pain I have caused them and I don't always think about the pain I have caused my God, how my sin is an affront to God and "God, how I have done this to you in spite of all the love you have shown me. I have once again failed you and in so doing, I've hurt other people." I should be sorry that I've hurt other people, but sometimes do you find yourself with your sorrow stopping there? Isn't it a little misplaced? It's close. It's nudging up real close to it, but the sorrow also that our God wants us to have is how our sins are an affront to him.

We can be sorry that our sins have led to the end of a marriage and the affect it might have on the children and things like that, and we should be. But it shouldn't stop there. It should go on to how we have been an abomination to our Lord through our sins, great or small, however we might view them. Each of them is what put Christ on that cross.

I guess it's not necessarily just misplaced, but don't stop short in your sorrow over sin. Take it all away to what it has done to Christ and then take it all the way to the cross where it was taken away. That's why Jesus endured all of this. That's why he stopped.

If you look at this in the Bible or I read it to you or you read it yourself, I don't think we get the depth of this because I have to believe he could hardly get the words out at this point in time. That's why they think he is calling Elijah. They couldn't understand him because the guy had been beaten to within an inch of his life, right? They think he's calling Elijah when he is calling out to God. Think of how he had to stop and turn and gasp out these words to these women because he wanted them to focus on their relationship to him and lead their sorrows to sorrow over their own sin and how it affects their relationship with God.

The Law can show us where you and I have fallen short. The Law can show us what we should do instead. But the Law could never lead us to true repentance, which is that change of heart. The Law cannot change our hearts to want to do what is right. The only thing that changes our hearts to want to do what is right is Jesus' life and death in our place, his death on the cross to take away our sins. The Gospel – that changes us. That changes our hearts. That changes us so that we want to do what we know is right before God. It empowers us to move beyond just continuing stopping short in our sorrows and grow to the point where we are sorry for all the affects of our sin, both on others in this world and on our Savior. Then we focus on that and then see again the depth of God's love for us, the depth of what Jesus went through for us, the depth of how much he longs to communicate to us in the Word and in the Sacrament. It's only the grace of God that brings about that change.

Never take your eyes off his grace. His Law will show you where you need to turn away from your sin. His grace empowers you to do it.