



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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March 20, 2013

Midweek Lenten Worship

Sermon Text: [Luke 23:39-43](#)

Pastor Randy Ott

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 16

Name of Wondrous Love - The Way

In Christ, dear fellow redeemed:

How do you plan your trips? How do you pick the highways you are going to travel, the roads you are going to use? How do you decide how you are going to drive from here to some other place? Do you get on Bing Maps or MapQuest and map it all out and let them give you the route? Do you get out Rand McNally and put the map next to you under the seat or shove it at your spouse and say, "Don't get me lost"? Do you make that crucial decision about your GPS...is it going to talk to me in the computer voice or the voice of Homer Simpson? What do you do to get yourself ready for a trip and decide how you are going to get from one place to the next? You don't just get in the car and say, "Okay, what should I do first? Backwards or forwards?" If you are going to take a long trip, you do something ahead of time to know the way you are going to take. You do something. You don't flip a coin and then go left for heads and right for tails. You need to know the way.

How about the way to heaven? You and I, by God's grace, know what Jesus said about that. He said, "I am the way. No one comes to the Father except through me. Broad is the way that leads to condemnation, but narrow is the way that leads to paradise." It's only through Jesus...he is the only way to heaven. You and I know that he lived in our place and died in our place. By this time, we understand that truth.

The name of Wondrous Love we are going to look at today from Jesus' suffering and death is The Way. We will be reminded why it's such a wondrous name of love because even though you and I have this head knowledge that Jesus is the only way to heaven, sometimes we act like he's just a road sign pointing us on what we are to do to get there. We get a little higher opinion of ourselves than we really ought to have. So tonight we remind ourselves it's a name of wondrous love because it's for sinners who have lost their way. And we see again that Jesus is the only way. We don't do thing one to get there.

Jesus is the way for sinners who have lost their way. So The Way is there on Calvary. He's on Golgotha. On each side of him there are those criminals...guys who had done something, committed some crime that the government had said, "You know what? You are such a bad criminal that we should hang you on a cross and you should die this gruesome death. That's what we think of you." That's not just me being judgmental and not loving. That's what one of them said about himself, right? He said,

“We are punished justly for we are getting what our deeds deserve.” He’s not making excuses anymore. He sees the guilt of his sin. This is what he deserved. This is what the Law said in the eyes of God and in the eyes of human law. They had lost their way and they were getting what they deserved.

The guy in the center, the one that is The Way, he’s not getting what he deserved, right? He had done nothing wrong. Pilate couldn’t find anything. Even this guy, this thief on the cross said, “This man has done nothing wrong.” Evidently looking at Jesus’ silent suffering, hearing him pray for those who were killing him and seeing these various things and maybe knowing something of Jesus ahead of time, who knows, led him to understand that Jesus was not like them. He did not deserve what he was enduring. He had committed no crime. He had actually committed no sin. Yet, Jesus belonged on that cross. Jesus had to be on that cross. Slapped on Jesus was the guilt of the sin of everyone that ever has lived.

We just said it a little bit earlier, didn’t we? Didn’t we just confess that truth a little bit earlier? After I read to you from Luke, what did we all say? “We all like sheep have gone astray.” Where does that come from? Who said that? Do you remember? I’m sure you do. Seven hundred years before Christ lived, that’s what Isaiah said. “We all like sheep have gone astray.” In fact, didn’t we sing the same thing? There was a fountain filled with blood. Did you notice that second verse after we sang about this fountain that washes our sins away when we sang, “The dying thief rejoiced to see that fountain in his day,” I’m good with that. But how did you feel about the next phrase? “And there have I, as vile as he”...wait a minute. I’m as vile as he is? You’re as vile as he is? Did you guys just get paroled to come here tonight out of prison? Are you as vile as he is?

This is where sometimes you and I have this head knowledge of Jesus...he deserved to be on the cross because he had to die for all the sins of the world, and he died even for the people on the cross. But sometimes we want to look at our sins and we don’t think we’ve completely lost our way. Sometimes (this is the very nature of our sinful nature) we don’t want to live under God where he is Master and Lord and we are servant. We are more comfortable being alongside of God and looking at our sins and saying, “Yeah, but...”

We tend to kind of rank sin, don’t we? We think God just must wring his hands in holy wrath at adultery and abortion, right? But gossip? A little white lie? That’s no big deal. He just kind of winks at that, doesn’t he? We’re good at seeing each other’s sins, but we’re not always good at seeing our own sin and seeing exactly what it means...that we are sinners who have lost our way. We don’t deserve anything from God. God doesn’t have the same list of bad sins that we do. Your gossip is just as bad as whatever those guys did on the right and left of Jesus. Your anger, your hatred, those things that you pat yourself on the back for after someone has said something or done something to you and you want to just let them have it but you bite your tongue and don’t say anything, but in your mind you’ve just torn them to pieces. In your mind, you’ve done it. Then you walk away and you pat yourself on the back because you didn’t say what you

were thinking. "Boy, God's lucky to have someone like me." Everyone of those thoughts just sent you to hell, didn't it?

We don't always think that way. We don't think we're sinners who lost our way. We don't actually believe it. Yes, we have a head knowledge, but we don't always live as though it is because we think hating, hurting, hitting back at someone else is just something that happens and it's part of life. But each one of those things that are part of life has fully earned hell. Until we honestly realize that, until we look in the mirror of God's Law and see what pitiful wretches we are, we won't really truly appreciate the name The Way and the wondrous love that is because we'll still think that in some way, some minutious form, you and I are doing something that God must give us credit for. But when we see what exactly we are, then this name The Way and the only way becomes such a name of wondrous love. This is something that the thief on the cross figured out. Somewhere along the line that day, the Holy Spirit gave him the gift of faith, gave him eyes of faith that led him to see that Jesus was sinless, gave him eyes of faith that believed that Jesus somehow, someway, later that day was going to be in paradise, right?

You are walking along there in Jerusalem, you are walking out by Golgotha, are you going to look up on those crosses and see those wretches suffering in that way and think, "Yeah, that guy is going to be in paradise later today." Humanly speaking, that thought will never cross your mind, right? That's a thought that has to come from God. Humanly speaking it makes no sense. Yet this thief who said, "I'm getting what I deserve. Don't you fear God? You're under the same sentence as him," sees Jesus as God. Then he looks at him and he says, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom. Just a crumb of your grace. Just a drop of your love. Don't give me the throne in heaven, but just remember me when you're there." That's what he is saying.

What do you think he thought when Jesus lifts up that bleeding head, looks over at him and says, "Truly I say to you. Today you will be with me in paradise." The morning began in jail. It continued carrying a piece of wood. It ended up with that wood being raised up and this thief on it, slowly, gruesomely, his life chokes out from him. Within 3-4 hours from this time they are going to come and break his bones so that he can't hold himself any longer so he'll die sooner so they can get him off the cross before the Sabbath Day begins. That's how this day had started. That's what this day looked like. But now, in this man's ears, are "Today you will be with me in paradise." What a difference a day makes. Looked like the jaws of hell were wide open and about to slam shut on him and Jesus says, "No. You've seen me for what I am." Who knows? Maybe this guy actually knew [Psalm 16](#).

We sang it earlier tonight. "My heart is glad and my tongue rejoices. My body also will rest secure because you will not abandon me to the grave nor will you let your holy one see decay." He said he's the holy one. Now he is saying "Remember me when you come into your kingdom." Who knows? Maybe he knew this. Maybe the Spirit brought him back to something he had heard sung before. I don't know. But he seems to have grasped the truth of what we sang.

Today...paradise...with me. Isn't that the definition of heaven, with me? The presence of God. That's what Jesus says to him. "Yes, your body will be in a grave." Some pauper's grave. We aren't even told what grave this guy got. We knew Jesus got Joseph's, but we don't know where this guy went. His body is in some grave, but his soul is with Jesus because he recognized that Jesus is the only way to heaven, not him, not anything he could have done.

Jesus is The Way to heaven, the only way. You know what he said, "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through me." That doesn't mean there are alternate routes. That doesn't mean to turn left here and then go five miles. It just means Jesus is The Way.

As Isaiah also said in [Chapter 40](#), it's a smooth way. It's been leveled out. It's as smooth as glass. It's paved and made easy for you because Jesus did all the work. You've not done thing one to take away any one of your sins, but Jesus says, "I'm not a road sign, point and you go here, go there, do this, exit now." Jesus is The Way. He is the free way that takes you to heaven. He sends the Spirit. The Spirit gets us on that highway, and he keeps us on that highway through Word and Sacrament. When you stop and consider that you are a sinner who has lost your way and God has grabbed you, rescued you, delivered you from that road that would have led to hell and put you on the highway to heaven, truly consider the depths of where you were and the incredible bliss of where God has taken you, do you think maybe it might bring a smile to your face?

WELS doesn't have to stand for We Enjoy Looking Serious. It could actually mean We Enjoy a Loving Savior. It's up to you how you reflect it to other people, isn't it? Amen.