

"Why, God? Why God."

Text: Luke 19:28-40

May God continue to hold each of you in his hand in the coming year, just as he has so capably done in the past – right up to this very moment. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians:

Every time you get into your vehicle you take a calculated risk. It's no secret that accidents happen, also to good people – to Christians – so every time you get into your vehicle you recognize at least the possibility that something bad will happen. You accept that risk, however, most often out of necessity, but also in part because you know that you have a loving, powerful God who watches over you. You also have a reasonable assumption that careful drivers can avoid most accidents.

Would you get into your vehicle if there was no doubt? If you somehow knew for a fact that you would die horribly in some unavoidable accident would you still get behind the wheel or climb into the passenger seat? Hard to imagine that anyone in their right mind would.

Yet that's exactly what Jesus did. That's exactly what was going on in our text for this morning. Jesus took a ride into the City of Jerusalem *knowing* that there he would not only die, but that he would there be subjected to an unimaginably tortured death the likes of which no human being before or after had ever or would ever suffer.

Why would he do such a thing? You see the answer every time you look in a mirror. He willingly climbed on that young donkey and rode to certain death for *you*. If ever you question your own personal worth or value, there is where you find your answer. There is where you find *God's* answer. You, in God's estimation, were worth the sacrifice of his own Son.

The text that describes the start of this incredible journey and thereby instructs our hearts this morning is found in Luke's Gospel, the 19th Chapter:

^{ESV} **Luke 19:28-40** *And when he had said these things, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. ²⁹ When he drew near to Bethphage and Bethany, at the mount that is called Olivet, he sent two of the disciples, ³⁰ saying, "Go into the village in front of you, where on entering you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever yet sat. Untie it and bring it here. ³¹ If anyone asks you, 'Why are you*

untying it?' you shall say this: 'The Lord has need of it.'" ³² *So those who were sent went away and found it just as he had told them. ³³ And as they were untying the colt, its owners said to them, "Why are you untying the colt?" ³⁴ And they said, "The Lord has need of it." ³⁵ And they brought it to Jesus, and throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. ³⁶ And as he rode along, they spread their cloaks on the road. ³⁷ As he was drawing near--already on the way down the Mount of Olives--the whole multitude of his disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen, ³⁸ saying, "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" ³⁹ And some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples." ⁴⁰ He answered, "I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out."*

These are the precious words of our God. Acknowledging them to be not only objectively true for others, but *subjectively* true for each one of us, *individually*, so we pray, **"Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth."** Amen.

Our text begins with these words: ***And when he had said these things, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem.*** What things? What was it that Jesus had just said? He had just met with Zacchaeus, the tax collector, and had followed that meeting by telling his disciples the Parable of the Minas. While that whole parable (together with the events surrounding it) is a study all by itself, this morning we weigh the last thing Jesus said at the conclusion of that parable: ***"But as for these enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, bring them here and slaughter them before me."***

This is one of those sayings of Jesus that the "soft Jesus" crowd refuses to acknowledge and therefore conveniently ignores. This sort of thing just doesn't fit into their man-made version of who Jesus was and is. They choose to ignore it because it absolutely *destroys* that upon which they base their eternal future. Their picture of Jesus is that of a meek pacifist – a rather impotent moralizer who just wanted everyone to get along. They see in Jesus a man who lived his life as an example of how to make this world a better place. Nothing more. In fact in their view even if Jesus was something more than what they have made of him, they are betting all of their eternal chips on the vague hope that if they must stand before this man on Judgment Day, he will simply give them a pass into heaven because he will recognize that they tried to do their best during their time on earth.

It is Jesus himself who promises them in advance that that is a bet that they will, with absolutely certainty, lose. Believing that Jesus was just a really good guy and moral teacher, and rejecting the fact that he is the Son of God and Savior of the world, makes them enemies. That view of Jesus amounts to exactly what he condemned when he said **“But as for these enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them...”** Nor did he leave any doubt as to the sentence he would impose on them: **“Bring them here and slaughter them before me.”**

These are the sort of words from Jesus that are strikingly at odds with the increasingly popular view of Jesus today. Jesus came to earth as the humble, suffering servant of mankind. He came **“not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom.”** But that’s not how he left earth, and it’s certainly not how he now exists in heaven at his Father’s side. Again, by his own words, he will come to earth the next time as King of kings and Lord of lords. He will come as the Divine Judge – the Great Decider of heaven and hell. And he will execute perfect justice perfectly, always and only on the basis of saving faith. As he will not hesitate to welcome believers into his heaven, so he will also not hesitate to sentence every single unbeliever to an eternity in hell.

This Jesus also gave us yet another preview of the mindset of the godless at the final judgment: they will be shocked by the sentence imposed on them, they will object, and they will want to know why. **“Why, God?” “On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’²³ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’”** (Matthew 7:22-23) Their objection, in other words, will be: *“Why, God, are you doing this to us?”* The simple answer is that unbelief is that which makes a human being an enemy of Jesus Christ. Regarding Jesus as anything less than the Son of God and Savior of the world is unbelief.

But they’re not the only ones who question God when things don’t go their way, are they? Ever hear yourself asking God the same question when things don’t go as planned? We began by talking about accidents. We know they happen, but we accept a calculated risk in large part because we cling to a rather optimistic assumption that accidents will happen to others. When they don’t, or when sickness, financial trouble, family discord and the like darken our doorways, sooner or later we ask God “Why?”

Actually the question, in and of itself, isn’t bad – not if we ask it in humility rather than arrogance – and not if we come to understand and accept the God-pleasing answer. Jesus himself asked the question, didn’t he?

Whether he asked as true man, not knowing the answer, or whether he asked so that you and I might come to a better appreciation by supplying the answer, Jesus asked “Why?” while he hung on the cross: **“My God, my God, why... why have you forsaken me?”** The question itself then is not the sin. Sin only enters the picture in connection with our attitude and/or answer. So what is the right answer?

Interestingly enough, the right answer just involves a change of emphasis and punctuation applied to the question. *Why God?* becomes *Why God*, as in, *“I don’t and can’t understand these things, which is why I have to leave it up to God to be God. He can answer the question, I cannot. He knows what he is doing, I do not. That’s “why God” and why not me – why God needs to be in control, why God needs to make the decisions in my life, why God needs to decide when I need good times or discipline, sickness or health, life or death.”*

Use our text for this morning as an example. Apply the “why” question to different aspects of this account and we lose our way almost immediately. Why, for example, did Jesus tell his disciples to go get that colt and then prepare them for the question of the owner when he could have just miraculously made a colt appear by the side of the road? The answer is that he knows what he is doing and he didn’t choose to do it that way. Why did he choose to enter Jerusalem the way he did? Why would the very stones cry out if he obeyed the command of the Pharisees to silence his disciples?

And those are just relatively trivial questions compared to this one: *Why did God’s salvation plan require the death of his beloved Son? Why couldn’t God – for whom nothing is impossible – figure out another way to accomplish his objective?* That’s not a silly question, by the way, since Jesus himself also pretty much asked the same thing of his Father in the Garden of Gethsemane. Matthew 26:39: **“My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.”** In fact he asked it multiple times: **“My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done.”**

There is, in fact, a bitter, hard, cold reality that we need to learn in the Father’s answer to his Son’s question. It’s the perfect example of why it is not only necessary but good and wise to answer our own “Why God?” with *“Why God”* – why we need to learn to answer our own questions of “Why?” with the resolution to leave the direction of our lives to our God. The cold, harsh reality here is that in life there is very often no way but the hard way. Not everything has a pleasant, easy solution. Mankind’s sin and rebellion wrecked absolutely everything.

That's the lesson we were taught in the Garden of Gethsemane and at the foot of the cross. Not even God the Father himself could create or declare an alternate plan by which mankind could be rescued. Not even God himself could simply forgive man's sin debt in the absence of an adequate sin payment. Not even God the Father himself could identify or create an adequate sin payment other than the perfect life of his Son Jesus, offered freely on the cross.

Here we can see the true evil of accepting Jesus as nothing more than a good example or moral teacher. Such a view at the same time downplays our own guilt and helplessness, and it absolutely dishonors and trivializes what the Son of God truly did for us. It is arrogant condescension where what is called for is humble awe and gratitude.

Which leaves us really with just one more question to ask of our God: *Why God? Why did you consent to do something like that for the likes of me? I understand that there was no other way to open heaven's door, but why would you want to invite a wretched sinner like me into the perfection of your heaven?*

Here God *has* seen fit to provide us with an answer – a most startling and humbling response: *“Because I love you – and have loved you from eternity. Before you were even born I knew you and chose you to be my own and to share my heaven with you.”* How do we respond to something like that? What can be our fitting reply or reaction? Thankfully, by divine inspiration others have provided guidance. From John: ***“Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God.”*** (1 John 3:1) From Paul: ***“Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!”*** (Romans 11:33) And finally this Word from Peter: ***“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for (us), ⁵ who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. ⁶ In this (we) rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, (we) have been grieved by various trials, ⁷ so that the tested genuineness of (our) faith--more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire--may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. ⁸ Though (we) have not seen him, (we) love him. Though (we) do not now see him, (we) believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, ⁹ obtaining the outcome of (our) faith, the salvation of (our) souls.”*** (1 Peter 1:3-9) Amen.

Scripture Readings

^{ESV} **Jeremiah 33:14-16** "Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. ¹⁵ In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David, and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. ¹⁶ In those days Judah will be saved, and Jerusalem will dwell securely. And this is the name by which it will be called: 'The LORD is our righteousness.'"

^{ESV} **1 Thessalonians 3:9-13** For what thanksgiving can we return to God for you, for all the joy that we feel for your sake before our God, ¹⁰ as we pray most earnestly night and day that we may see you face to face and supply what is lacking in your faith? ¹¹ ¶ Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you, ¹² and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, ¹³ so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

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Today's Organist: Suzannah Miller

The First Sunday in Advent – November 29, 2015

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 705 (Brown Hymnal)

"Come O Long-Expected Jesus"

The Order of Morning Service – Red Hymnal page 5.

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back of the bulletin)

The Old Testament Lesson: (Jeremiah 33:14-16) We have entered a new church year, as well as the season of Advent. This is the time we celebrate the fulfillment of what was long ago foretold in our Old Testament Lesson by the Prophet Jeremiah. The promise made by God the Father has been honored. The promised Savior has been given as a gift to the world. What a privilege to know and believe this life-giving truth.

The Epistle Lesson: (1 Thessalonians 3:9-13) In our Epistle Lesson Paul prays that those who read his letter might express their love for their God by showing their love for each other. While we know that such charitable feelings do not represent the sum and substance of the holiday season we begin this morning, it is certainly right that Christians demonstrate their love for their Lord in their treatment of one another.

The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed (Red Hymnal page 12)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn - 63 (Red Hymnal)

"On Jordan's Bank"

The Sermon - Text: Luke 19:28-40 (Printed on the back page)

"Why, God? Why God."

"Create In Me" (The Offertory) (Red Hymnal page 12)

The Post-Sermon Hymn – 528 (Verses 1-5) (Red Hymnal)

"If God Himself Be For Me"

The Offering, followed by the Prayers

The Closing Hymn – 56 (Verses 1&5) (Red Hymnal)

"Jesus Came, the Heavens Adoring"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with congregations throughout the United States, as well as mission affiliates scattered around the world. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again.

Attendance - Sunday (48) Average (49) Wednesday (32)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship/coffee time
Wednesday	-5:45 p.m.	– Confirmation Class
	-7:00 p.m.	– Midweek Advent Service
Saturday	-6:00 p.m.	– Annual Church Christmas Party
Next Sunday	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship/coffee time
	-11:30 a.m.	– Church Council Meeting

CLC News – Professor John Pfeiffer of Immanuel Lutheran College in Eau Claire has announced his retirement at the end of the current school year. Pastor Michael Gurath has returned the call to Gethsemane of Spokane.

Church Council and Annual Voters' Meetings – The Church Council is scheduled to meet next Sunday following the fellowship time. Please also note that our Annual Voters' Meeting is scheduled for two weeks from today, Sunday, December 13. A fellowship meal is also being planned.

Council Notes – All members of the Council, plus the Pastor, were present for the November 22 meeting. Our head organist was asked to give a report to the Council concerning our search for a replacement organ. The Council officially established an "Organ Fund" and a full report will be shared with the congregation at the Annual Meeting on 12/13. Treasurer Adams reported that offerings for October fell short of budgeted needs by \$1,557. A preliminary budget was approved to include a 1.2% increase. The donation of a cabinet for the Cry Room was approved with thanks. At the request of the Women's Fellowship, the Council will look into building or buying a chair dolly to move and store our folding chairs. The Council also approved the suggestion from the Women's Fellowship that an appropriate passage or prayer be stenciled above the serving counter. This year's Nominating Committee is Ron H., Mike M. and Pastor Roehl.

Advent Services – The first of our three midweek Advent services is scheduled for this Wednesday at 7 pm.