

Lent 2024 – The Hidden Glory of the Cross

"It Is Hidden in the Savior's Powerful Words"

Text: Luke 23:32-43

*O dearest Jesus, what law hast Thou broken
That such sharp sentence should on Thee be spoken?
Of what great crime hast Thou to make confession –
What dark transgression?*

*The sinless Son of God must die in sadness;
The sinful child of man may live in gladness;
Man forfeited his life...
and is acquitted
God is committed. (TLH 143)*

Dear Fellow Recipients of the gift of forgiveness:

This evening, as part of our series "The Hidden Glory of the Cross," we consider the fact that the glory of the cross is hidden in our Savior's powerful words. The text that will form the basis for our meditation this evening is found in the 23rd Chapter of Luke's Gospel:

^{ESV}(Luke 23:32-43) Two others, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. ³³ And when they came to the place that is called The Skull, there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. ³⁴ And Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." And they cast lots to divide his garments. ³⁵ And the people stood by, watching, but the rulers scoffed at him, saying, "He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One!" ³⁶ The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine ³⁷ and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!" ³⁸ There was also an inscription over him, "This is the King of the Jews." ³⁹ One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!" ⁴⁰ But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? ⁴¹ And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong." ⁴² And he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." ⁴³ And he said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise."

This is God's Word. Confident that our God will bless us through the study of these words, including further revealing to us the glory of the Cross that remains hidden to the world, so we pray, "**Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth.**" Amen.

Comparing and contrasting can reveal otherwise hidden truths. Contrasting, for example, the shameful actions of one with the honorable actions of another can provide insights that might otherwise escape us. This is also true with words, which is why this evening we compare/contrast the words of our Savior Jesus during his trial and crucifixion with what was said by those around him.

The reality is that there really is no *comparison* since the *contrast* could not be more pronounced or stark. There are, however, lessons to be learned and valuable applications we don't want to miss.

If you had to assign a one-word theme to the statements of Jesus' adversaries, it could well be "*expedient*." *Expedient* means: "*Suitable or efficient for accomplishing a purpose but based on a concern for self-interest rather than principle.*" That pretty much sums it up, doesn't it. The word itself was specifically and accurately applied to the High Priest in John 18:14, "**It was Caiaphas who had advised the Jews that it would be expedient that one man should die for the people.**" There are other words that also apply: seedy, dishonest, dishonorable, brutal, cruel, heartless – it's a long list. Yet at the heart of all of it was expedience. Jesus' adversaries wanted something, and in typical human fashion they said or did whatever would most easily achieve their goals.

The goal of the Jewish leaders was to preserve their position and power. Since Jesus posed a threat to both, they lied, mischaracterized, insulted, and bribed. Pure expedience – opting for the quickest route from where they were to where they wanted to be, which was a world without Jesus in the way.

Pilate's goal was to avoid anything that would make him look bad in the eyes of his bosses in Rome. Expedience for him was therefore to repeatedly pronounce Jesus innocent, and then punish him as though he were guilty. And then wash his hands. His words were oxymoronic, if not simply moronic. "*Don't you realize, Jesus, that I have the power to condemn or release you?*" Then to the crowd, "*This man is innocent.*" The obvious course of action? Release him. But that would not have been expedient. It would not get him what he wanted.

The pig Herod wanted simply to be entertained. *“Do one of your magic tricks, Jesus.”* Since Jesus refused to oblige, the most expedient path to his goal, which, again, was to be entertained by Jesus, was to gain a bit of sadistic pleasure out of watching a bound and helpless prisoner beaten and humiliated.

This, by the way, is where you and I fit in – not in a detached, condescending condemnation of the sins of others but of our own sins, our own all-too-frequent embrace of expedience. We’ll all see it in ourselves, if we will just have the courage and honesty to look. When the goal is to avoid shame or punishment, the path of expedience is simply to lie. When the goal is financial gain, cheat or steal. When the goal is to elevate self, or to feel better about self, the path of expedience is to gossip about, or malign, others. When the sinful flesh craves pleasures that God himself has forbidden, the path of expedience is to justify sin with ridiculous rationalizations like *“everyone else is doing it”* or *“I prayed about it so I’m convinced God won’t mind – and if he does, he’ll forgive me.”* Our own sinful flesh absolutely adores expedience.

Yet just when we might reasonably assume that we have reached the nadir, the low-point of man’s conduct in connection with our Savior’s passion, we arrive at our text for this evening and we find an even deeper level of sadistic depravity. Bear in mind that at this point, at least in the minds of Jesus’ enemies, they are convinced that they have won. They have successfully bullied Pilate into nailing their adversary to a Roman cross – the most shameful and brutal form of punishment and execution available to them. What is their reaction? Pick an expression. They spike the ball, rub his face in it, dance in the endzone. What is absolutely lacking is any shred of human decency or compassion. There is no remorse, no pity, no mercy. In the face of terrible physical agony (to say nothing of the far greater spiritual torment) they can only taunt and mock. From our text: ***“The rulers scoffed at him, saying, ‘He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One!’”*** They weren’t alone: ***“The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine ³⁷ and saying, ‘If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!’”*** Even one of the criminals crucified with him joined in: ***“Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!”***

The utter brutality and lack of compassion is not included in our Bibles simply for dramatic effect. It reveals the true nature of our sin and the true nature of our relationship with God apart from Jesus Christ. There is no such thing as soft sin, gentle sin, kind sin. Nor is there such a thing as neutrality in man’s relationship with God. We are either his beloved children through faith in Jesus Christ, his Son, or we are brutal, craven, sociopathic enemies. There is no neutral or middle ground. It is delusional

thought to imagine that anyone can reject Jesus as Son of God and Savior and yet somehow remain his friend and ally. If Jesus is not your Savior, God is your enemy.

While that’s the hard cold reality, that’s certainly not what Jesus himself wants. In his own words: ***“For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”*** ^{ESV}(Mark 10:45) Again from John’s Gospel, ***For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. ¹⁸ Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.*** (John 3:17-18) Jesus came to suffer that all might gain forgiveness and reconciliation. Contrast the words he spoke in our text with those of his enemies. Even while they carried out the single greatest injustice in the history of human existence against him, what were Jesus’ first words? ***“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”*** The glory of the cross to which they nail the Lamb of God is, first of all, forgiveness. This is the power and glory that Peter boldly proclaimed to the Jewish Sanhedrin after Jesus’ resurrection, ***“The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. ³¹ God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.”*** (Acts 5:30-31)

Contrast also the next words of Jesus in our text, which were in reply to the repentant malefactor that was crucified with him, ***“Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.”*** Don’t miss the power that remains hidden to the world in these simple words. The power of the cross and the power of Jesus’ words had worked a profound change in the heart of this criminal. It is a success story almost without equal. In the very last hours of his sin-riddled life – for he himself admitted that in crucifixion he was receiving exactly what his actions deserved – the power of God’s Word changed this man’s heart and rescued him. He recognized, at the very end of his time of grace, that the man suffering next to him was thereby paying also for *his* sins.

Here the myth of purgatory is crushed, along with the damning notion of work-righteousness. An entire life of sin could never be satisfied by one sentence spoken in defense of Jesus. What he spoke was simply the obvious truth, ***“This man has done nothing wrong.”*** It was evidence of the faith that had been worked in him. Not even the most hardcore work righteous theology could claim that a human being can earn his way into heaven with one simple declaration of obvious truth. Jesus’ words and the power of the cross did for this man exactly what Jesus

intended. They worked the miracle of conversion, creating saving faith. In so doing they turned the man, in an instant, from death to life. The result was that at the end of this his last day, the man would join Jesus in the eternal, timeless bliss of heaven.

Just as we should never expect the world to recognize the power of forgiveness represented by the cross of Jesus, so also we cannot afford to lose sight of it. Forgiveness and reconciliation with God are not just something; they are everything. Those gifts were provided to us on the cross. Since man has no power to earn forgiveness, and therefore also no power to reconcile himself to God, that by which those priceless gifts were earned for us represents a treasure and a power without compare.

Be reminded therefore of the power and the glory of the cross, for it is, as Paul put it Romans 1:16, "***The power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.***" Amen.

Weekly Hymn and Meditation Schedule

February 14

Hymns: 140 (1-3, 5), 149, 159

Lenten Theme:
"The Hidden
Glory of the
Cross"

*"Hidden in the
Savior's Solitude"*

Text: Luke 18:31-34

February 21

Hymns: 142 (1-3)
794, 154

Lenten Theme:
"The Hidden
Glory of the
Cross"

*"Hidden in the
Savior's Sighs"*

Text: Luke 22:39-46

February 28

Hymns: 141, 172
(1,2 & 4), 156

Lenten Theme:
"The Hidden
Glory of the
Cross"

*"Hidden in His
Rejection by the World"*

Text: John 18:33-19:1

March 6

Hymns: 155, 158
151 (1, 6-7)

Lenten Theme:
"The Hidden
Glory of the
Cross"

*"Hidden in His
Rejection by His Own"*

Text: Mat. 26:57-68

March 13

Hymns: 149, 181,
145

Lenten Theme:
"The Hidden
Glory of the
Cross"

*"Hidden in His
Powerful Words"*

Text: Luke 23:32-43

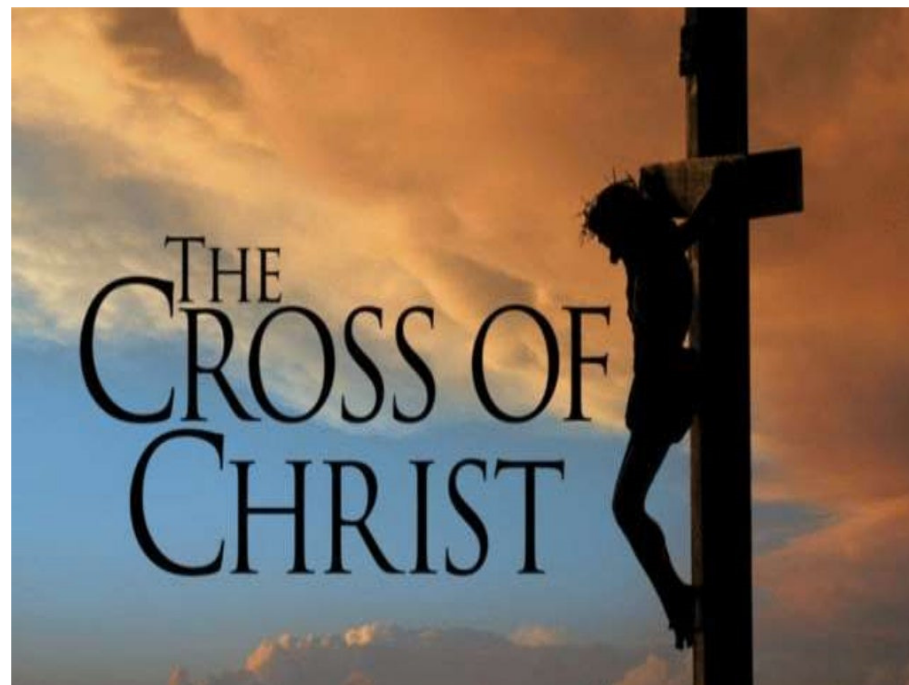
March 20

Hymns: 166, 421
171 (1, 3-7)

Lenten Theme:
"The Hidden
Glory of the
Cross"

*"Hidden in the
Savior's Stumbling"*

Text: Mark 15:17-21



Lent – 2024
“The Hidden Glory
of the Cross”

St Paul Lutheran Church
Bismarck, North Dakota

-Please return this bulletin to the Entry Table for use next week-

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Mid-Week Lenten Services - 2024

The Opening Hymn *(As noted on the back page and on the Hymn Board)*

Invocation

Pastor: *In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.*

Congregation: *(Spoken) Amen.*

Confession and Absolution *(TLH 318)*

P: *Acknowledging that we stand in the presence of our Holy God we humble ourselves, and in true repentance we confess our sins:*

All: *Before Thee, God, who knowest all, with grief and shame I prostrate fall.
I see my sins against Thee, Lord, the sins of thought, of deed, and word.
They press me sore; I cry to Thee: O God, be merciful to me!*

*O Lord, my God, to Thee I pray; oh, cast me not in wrath away!
Let Thy good Spirit ne'er depart, but let Him draw to Thee my heart
That truly penitent I be: O God, be merciful to me!*

P: Jesus Christ himself has been punished for your sins. God the Father has placed upon Jesus the iniquity of us all. By His authority, and according to His command, I announce to you the divine decree of our God that all of your sins are forgiven, in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

All: *O Jesus, Lord, Thy precious blood is to my soul a cleansing flood.
You turn not, Lord, Thy guest away, but grant that justified I may
Go to my house at peace with Thee: God has been merciful to me!*

The Reading of the Passion History

The Confession of Faith

(Explanation of the 2nd Article from Luther's Small Catechism, Sydow Edition)

**I believe that Jesus Christ, true God,
begotten of the Father from eternity,
and also true man,
born of the virgin Mary, is my Lord.**

**He has redeemed me, a lost and condemned person,
purchased and won me from all sin, from death, and from the
power of the devil,**

**not with gold or silver,
but with His holy, precious blood
and His innocent suffering and death.**

**He did this that I should be His very own,
live under Him in His kingdom,
and serve Him in eternal righteousness, innocence, and joy;
just as He is risen from death,
lives and reigns in eternity.
This is most certainly true.**

The Pre-Sermon Hymn *(As noted on the back page, Hymn Boards, and screens)*

The Sermon (Lenten Theme: *"The Hidden Glory of the Cross"*)

The Response – *(TLH Hymn 354)*

**In the Cross of Christ I glory, Tow'ring o'er the wrecks of time.
All the light of sacred story Gathers round its head sublime.**

**When the woes of life o'er-take me, Hopes deceive and fears annoy,
Never shall the Cross forsake me; Lo, it glows with peace and joy.**

**Bane and blessing, pain and pleasure, By the Cross are sanctified;
Peace is there that knows no measure, Joys that thro' all time abide.**

The Prayer of the Day

The Lord's Prayer

The Benediction

P: *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
And the love of God the Father,
And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.*

C: *(Sung by all) Amen, Amen, Amen.*

The Closing Hymn *(As noted on the back page and on the Hymn Board)*

Silent Prayer

Announcements *[All are invited to remain for fellowship and light refreshments.]*