

Lead Me to the Cross

November 21, 2010

[Luke 23:33 – 43](#)

The Reading of God’s Word for the people of God.

33 When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him there, along with the criminals—one on his right, the other on his left. 34 Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.

35 The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, “He saved others; let him save himself if he is God’s Messiah, the Chosen One.”

36 The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar 37 and said, “If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself.”

38 There was a written notice above him, which read: THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.

39 One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: “Aren’t you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!”

40 But the other criminal rebuked him. “Don’t you fear God,” he said, “since you are under the same sentence? 41 We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.”

42 Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”

43 Jesus answered him, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

This is the Word of God and It can be trusted. Thank be to God.

Let us pray:

God of all Creation, hear our prayer today. Like the criminal on the one side, who has hurled insult at injury, we have lived a life that is displeasing and dishonorable of You. Let us not let our own lives end there. Guide us, direct us and help us to be aware of your presence in all that we do so that we, too, may find solace in knowing that you are always with us, ready to forgive even as you forgave the criminal who hung on the other side who, even in his most broken state, was aware that God was with him. Help us to fully become aware that God is with each of us. Lead us to the Cross, Oh Lord. Lead us not because the season of our calendar dictates it but rather because the season of our heart demands it from each of us to come; to come and know that You are the Messiah, God’s Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ. May we find comfort and support in the message you have prepared for us today. Amen.

What a wonderful text to conclude our year of Luke in the lectionary cycle. Luke has given us much to think about and much to ponder in his gospel account of the life of Christ; particularly Luke's recognition of God's radically inclusive message of love expressed through the life and teachings of Christ. Luke teaches us that Jesus spoke well of Samaritans ([9:51 – 55](#), [10:30 – 37](#), [17:11 – 19](#)) and even included women as valuable followers ([8:1 – 3](#), [10:38 – 42](#), [18:1-7](#), [21:1 – 4](#), [23:27 – 31](#), [24:1 – 10](#)). Even Luke's dedication of his gospel to a Gentile shows that the Christ's message of love for all has not been forgotten. ([1:1 – 4](#)) Even more so, Luke shows us that God wants to forgive humanity for their transgressions and even longs to do so as seen in the parable of The Lost Sheep, The Lost Coin and The Lost Son, each of which ended with a call to celebrate, for what was once lost has been found. ([15:1 – 32](#))

Now at the end of his gospel, Luke gives us the pinnacle account of Christ ministry and purpose here on Earth. It is a place where confusion will be overpowered by understanding and darkness will be overcome by light. It is one of the most dramatic stories of God's radical love and grace found in any of the Gospels. Here we find the Son of God, thrown out on the city garbage dump of Jerusalem, and he is still reaching out to the despised and rejected with his last breath! We have been told time and again throughout the gospels that Jesus managed to escape those who were after him because the time was not right ([Luke 4:30](#), [24:16](#); [John 7:30](#), [8:59](#), [10:39](#), [12:36](#)). And so here it is, the time has come, the time is right and so we must take a moment and reflect on what has made this moment right when all the other times were wrong.

For me, it is not singularly about the crucifixion itself, but more so it is about those who hung there beside Jesus at the time of his crucifixion and what they symbolize for each of us. No other gospel speaks of the criminals who were there with Jesus but I believe that Luke got it right when he gave an account of their conversation with Christ. First and foremost because it

reminds us that God is always with us, there to listen and to respond. You see, it doesn't matter if we hurl insult at injury, offer up praises or simply say God, I am broken and cannot do it on my own; God is with us. So here we have two criminals, a symbol of brokenness and inability to be in control and we are given a report of how we may or may not respond during this time.

On the one hand we have ridicule and disbelief. "Aren't you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!" ([v. 39](#)) How many times have we in our lowest state of existence, in our time of deepest despair do we look to God and say, "Hey, you're God, right? Then do something for me! Go ahead, do something!" The problem in this is that we don't really want to be helped or we don't really believe that God can help. In order for us to be saved by God, we must recognize and acknowledge that there is a God and for many of us, that is simply too much to endure. And I am not only speaking to the most heart hearted of sinners today. I am also talking to the Christians; those who sit here within these four walls today, as well as those who extend outside of our community and profess Christ to be their Lord and Savior.

Are we Christians by title only or do we genuinely understand what it means to be reconciled by the blood of Christ?

Do we really know what Christ intended when he said to his disciples, "this is my body given for you" and "this cup contains the blood of my body which will be poured out for the remission of your sin and the sin of all those who come after you."

Do we understand today that as Christ spoke to these two men on the crosses that hung beside his that he is speaking of a choice that each of us must make; a choice to truly acknowledge Jesus as the Christ, the one true Messiah, or to simply say the words without any belief that God can and will do something for us.

At the table before his disciples Jesus commanded of them, “In as much as you do this, remember me.” Here at the cross, it is no longer Jesus who is the center of attention, but it is us. Then he [that is the one who hung on the other side] said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” Remember me! Think of me! In the fulfillment of all that you have been called to do; your birth, your life, your ministry and now in your death, please remember me! It is a funny statement, I think, to ask God to remember you in your weakest moments if we acknowledge that God is always with us but yet, God wants us to call the name of Christ all the same. To know that God is with us and to verbalize our understanding of God’s presence is entirely two different things. If we are to be saved, if we are to be remembered, we must call on the name of God’s Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ and acknowledge that we believe God can and will do something to save us; that God can and will remember us, not because we demand it of God, but because God longs to do so.

So who are these two men, these criminals? For me, the first criminal is Satan, the epitome of all that is evil, the most hared hearted of all hearts. It is the same one who first tested Jesus in the desert and here in the words of this man we hear a resounding echo of the words of Satan as Jesus was challenged to prove his deity then as he is being challenged now. Recall, if you will, the word of [Luke 4:9 – 11](#), “The devil led him to Jerusalem and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. “If you are the Son of God,” he said, “throw yourself down from here. For it is written: “He will command his angels concerning you to guard you carefully; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.”” Only this time it is not Jesus who responds to the words of Satan, but it is the second criminal, echoing again Jesus response, “Do not put the Lord your God to the test.” ([v. 12](#)) This encounter with Satan at the cross is the more opportune time we are told about in [Luke 4:13](#) and again Satan has

failed to turn Jesus attention away from his mission and his purpose. Could Jesus have taken himself down from the cross? Absolutely! But he does not because there is still the fulfillment of the mission to complete. Adam, the first named man of Creation, must be returned to the Garden and so it is in Jesus words to the one who hung on his other side that he says, “Today you will be with me in Paradise.” (v. 43) At this moment, the purpose of Christ mission is revealed and so everything is now as it should have been in the beginning. Adam is returned to the Garden and humanity’s ability to live in relationship with their Creator, our God, is restored.

As we end our journey today to Jerusalem today let us leave here with hope in our hearts, joy in existence and a realization of God’s presence in our lives. God is with us. God longs to be in relationship with each of us and will stop at nothing short of our own hard hearted rejection to make God’s will and way for our lives known to each of us. I invite each of you today to allow yourselves to be led to the Cross of Calvary, not with the anticipation that God *can* save you, but rather with the joy and understanding that God *will* save you.

Looking only to the One who has restored the very Creation of God to its original purpose and plan, let us find hope in the Cross of Christ Jesus and awareness in the road that has lead us here. Lord it is our prayer that You, too, lead each of us to the cross. Amen!

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WMJox5-K5jU&feature=player_embedded