

Sermon Notes for 3/16/16 (Midweek Lent 6)
Preached at Jehovah Lutheran – St. Paul, MN

Text: Luke 23:26-43

Theme: WHOSE INTEREST IS AT HEART FOR YOU?

Hymn: LSB 428 (Cross of Jesus, Cross of Sorrows)

The Point: As Jesus points His own life and ministry totally at the service of wandering, rebellious sinners, so He invites us to spend our lives serving others in His name and to His glory.

Introduction: The women, the soldiers, the criminals – three very different groups of people present on Good Friday, groups with very different agendas, but all interacting with Jesus at the height of His suffering and passion. And Jesus' interaction with each group tells us about His orientation, which was always toward serving those around Him, not Himself.

The trials having been concluded, Jesus makes His way down the Via Dolorosa, the Way of Sorrows, the streets of Jerusalem leading to Calvary. As Jesus stumbles with the cross beam, the soldiers press Simon of Cyrene into service to carry the cross for Jesus. Large crowds of people throng the streets. After all, it is Passover Week, and many Jewish pilgrims have come from all around the Empire to celebrate at Jerusalem. Many are “following” Jesus – the word “follow” is most often used by Luke to speak of discipleship. Here the walk of discipleship literally follows the way of the cross, to which Jesus had pointed many times in His teaching.

Among the crowd are a number of women who carry on loud wailing, mourning for what is happening to this Man whom they had considered their friend, their master, even the Savior. The longest statement of Jesus after His trial takes place right there in the middle of the street while they are crying and carrying on. Jesus tells them not to cry for Him, but for themselves and their children, who will face days of horror and terror in the not-too-distant future and who, if they do not repent, will face final judgment without an advocate on their side. One commentator (Just) says this: “There should be no tears for him, since he is simply going to the goal placed before him by the Father and that goal will end in resurrection. There should be no tears for the rejected one; rather, tears should be shed for those who continue to reject him, since they will not share in his redemption.”

Jesus looked ahead to the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, which would happen 40 years later, only a generation or two after these events. But at the same time, He pictures the final judgment as well, and the call for repentance that is thereby engendered. Jesus spoke about a green tree. During the last week, we had the opportunity to see a number of trees that are definitely springing with life, some flowering, some already leafing out. Spring is in force down south. The green tree that Jesus spoke of was the ministry that He was carrying out, the initial blossoming of the kingdom of God in their midst, pictured as a tree in springtime. But after He had risen and ascended, when the Church proclaimed the Gospel in the area and many opposed it and sought to drive Christians out of the area, no wonder the judgment that fell would be so harsh!

Of course, we still live in the time of the green tree in a sense, when the call to repent and believe in the Gospel still bears fruit in the lives of people the world over. When the final trumpet sounds, there will be no more time to repent, only the burning fire of judgment that will overtake the thorns and briars which have steadfastly opposed the intervention of the Messiah into their lives.

The next word Jesus speaks fills out the call to repentance. For, as the soldiers are driving the spikes through His flesh, rather than cursing them and those who revile Him, He prays for them, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” Of course, those words have the soldiers as one

immediate target group. But Jesus' words are more comprehensive than that, for He asks for forgiveness and clemency for all of us as well. Every one of us here has committed sins of thought, word, and deed – sins for which Jesus walked the dusty, blood-stained road to Calvary, sins for which He suffered, sins for which He died. He prays that we also might be forgiven. Even though we may have had no idea what grief and suffering our sins have caused, we are objects of His prayer for the Father to forgive.

Jesus also finds Himself in a company of criminals that day. Three men stretched out on the rough-hewn wood of three crosses, three men with nails driven through hands and feet in Roman crucifixion style, three men raised between heaven and earth to breathe their last on this fateful day. Recently I heard (maybe you did, too) interviews that *60 Minutes* did with death-row inmates in a Texas prison. One young man was asked what he would be thinking when the time came for him to die. His reply, "Wondering whether I will go to heaven or hell." That would be a tragic thought for my last moment. How much better that we should live with the assurance that Jesus gave to the criminal on the one hand, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise." Here a noted and convicted criminal received assurances from Jesus Himself that he would be in paradise with the Savior.

You and I can live with that assurance as well. We don't have to wonder what our fate will be. For Jesus' sake and purely due to His actions of suffering and dying for you, your future has been guaranteed. You don't need to worry. You don't need to doubt. Heaven has been assured to you by the same Savior who spoke those reassuring words to a criminal dying with Him that day.

Conclusion: As Jesus points His own life and ministry totally at the service of wandering, rebellious sinners, so He invites us to spend our lives serving others in His name and to His glory. Whether we are like the women, mourning over the fate of this world, or like the soldiers, hardened and just doing our jobs the best we can, or like the criminals, devastated and tormented over the weight of our wrongdoing, Jesus has words of hope and life and forgiveness for us this day. And once we have heard His words calling us to repentance and faith, we also have the strength and energy and direction to reach out to others who need the assurance that eternity is theirs through the offering of the Savior into death and through His escape from death in resurrection glory. May those truths be first in our hearts and on our lips, to Jesus' honor and praise. AMEN!