

St. Luke's Evangelical Lutheran Church  
Pastor Mark Gartner  
Sermon for Fourth Midweek Lenten Service -- March 14<sup>th</sup>, 2012

### **Luke 23:26-31**

**As they led him away, they seized Simon from Cyrene, who was on his way in from the country, and put the cross on him and made him carry it behind Jesus. A large number of people followed him, including women who mourned and wailed for him. Jesus turned and said to them, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children. For the time will come when you will say, ‘Blessed are the barren women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!’ Then ““they will say to the mountains, “Fall on us!” and to the hills, “Cover us!”” For if men do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?”**

Dear Followers of our Lord and Savior,

Tragedy often brings tears to our eyes. Suffering does too. Animal shelters often show pictures of animals that have been abused when they make their request for donations. The pictures of pathetic puppies and kittens stir our emotions. From time to time movies stir our emotions so that we must reach for a tissue to dry our eyes. It happens regularly when we see and understand tragic cases that move our hearts and open our tear ducts. The case before us during Lent is one of those cases. The death of Jesus is a tragedy. He suffered as an innocent victim ground into the dust by powerful religious leaders who were assisted by cowardly government officials. As Jesus left Jerusalem on the way to his crucifixion, a large number of people, including women, mourned and wailed for him. His words to them directed those women to see the cross and its significance. Pointedly he told them not to weep for him. We can heed his words too because they point us to his cross.

### **Theme: Shed No Tears For Jesus!**

- 1. Jesus doesn't need anyone's sympathy.**
- 2. Shed tears for your own tragedy**

#### **I. Jesus doesn't need anyone's sympathy.**

The gospel writers all paint a graphic picture. We see the brutal truth about the death of Jesus—a tragic event if there ever was one. Jesus had been arrested in the dead of night and whisked away from the public eye until his public trial in the morning on Good Friday. During the night the Jewish leaders had not only questioned Jesus but convicted him for telling them that he was the Messiah. While it was the truth, they considered his bold assertion blasphemy and guilty of death.

Pilate offered no bright contrast as the tragic events unfolded. After an interview, which convinced Pilate that Jesus was innocent, he nevertheless scourged Jesus and humiliated him before the crowd of angry Jews. The Roman soldiers did not hold back. Pilate issued the order for his crucifixion. The soldiers scourged him, made him a crown of thorns, and beat that crown of thorns into the head of Jesus with a reed. They made fun of this “king” who held only a reed as a mock scepter and wore a faded soldier's robe as royal robes. What a tragic figure!

The soldiers then led Jesus out of Jerusalem to be crucified with two others. The beating Jesus received had taken its toll on his body. He had not slept during the night but had been abused by the Jewish leaders. Then the brutal treatment of the scourging and the crown of thorns had weakened him further. His blood was already on the floor where he was scourged, and he continued to bleed from those wounds. Luke tells us that the soldiers forced Simon from Cyrene to carry the cross. They considered Jesus too weak to carry his own cross. The brutal spectacle attracted a crowd. It's no wonder! We all want to look at such events, whether it's an ambulance pulling up at a neighbor's house or an accident on the commute to work. We slow down to look.

What made this picture so tragic is that Jesus had done nothing wrong. Pilate knew it, and so did the Jewish leaders. Jesus had challenged them to prove that he had done something, anything, wrong. He was innocent and pure. Not only was he innocent but he had demonstrated nothing but kindness and compassion during his ministry. How many times do the Scriptures comment that Jesus had compassion on those who came seeking his help? His message was not one of rebellion or revolution. He spoke of God's love and the blessings of that love for sinners. He promised eternal life to believers. His gentle touch had healed many. Only a few days earlier he had been welcomed into Jerusalem by a large crowd shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" Those cries had turned to "Crucify him! Crucify him!" Now all those shouts of joy and then anger had turned to mourning and wailing. The scene brought tears to the eyes of the women.

This certainly is a human tragedy of huge proportions. It is the story of betrayal, suffering, and injustice. The news networks in our day would make this a headline story. They know how such a story would tug at our heart strings and stir our emotions. Yet Jesus spoke to these women, saying, "Do not weep for me" (Lk 23:28).

Why not weep for Jesus? This is a human tragedy. Jesus is human like these women and like all of us. He endured pain. He bled like anyone else. He was abandoned not only by his closest friends but also by his own countrymen. They screamed, "Crucify him!" He appeared to be a helpless human in the grip of powerful forces. Yes, he is like us.

That is why we should *not* weep at this tragic event. Jesus is like us. He is our substitute. He has flesh and blood as we have. Our bodies would bleed at brutal treatment like that which the soldiers gave Jesus. His body was no different. Jesus is fully human and is our substitute. As we hear Jesus tell the women not to weep, we are encouraged to wipe our eyes of tears too. Shed no tears for Jesus. Instead, see his cross as the payment for your sins. He became human so that he would assume our place and be our substitute. Jesus became sin—your sin and my sin—so we might be declared free of sin and acquitted before God's justice. That's what Paul tells us too: "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Co 5:21).

Jesus left Jerusalem surrounded by Roman soldiers. Simon carried the instrument of our Savior's torture and death. Tragic. Yet we shed no tears for Jesus. But we cannot be unmoved by what we see. Jesus suffered for us. He was your human substitute and mine. He was beaten, scourged, humiliated, and ridiculed for us. It was our punishment that he endured. Our hearts are moved with reverence for a Savior who loves us this much. We are moved to gratitude that he took our place and suffered what we deserved. In his cross and all the suffering of his passion, we can grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ for unworthy sinners like us.

## **2. Shed tears for your own tragedy.**

The tears of the women were understandable. They saw the tragedy, but not the significance of this human tragedy. Jesus encouraged them to dry their tears. He wanted to shift their attention away from the tragedy of his death to help them understand what he was doing for them. Jesus asked them to redirect their vision, to see his cross. He did that by asking them to think of their own human tragedies and the tragedies of their children.

Perhaps some of them had personal stories of human suffering. We do not know. The reality is that without the cross of Jesus, every human life is tragic. Life is a struggle. It was for these women. It would remain a struggle even after Jesus' death and resurrection. It has always been that way for all humans. Some experience more hardship and difficulty than others, but life always comes with some tears and anguish. As these women journeyed through life, they would age, grow weary, perhaps be unable to move around without assistance. At the end of their journeys, they would be carried out of their homes and buried like all others. That should sound familiar to you and me too. We may have electricity and cars, but hardship, difficulty, and death intrude into our lives too.

Jesus reminded these women, "Do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children" (Lk 23:28). Their children would experience the same as every other human throughout history. They might

sacrifice for their children so that the next generation might have a better life. But their children would end up in the grave. Even if their children accomplished great things, those accomplishments would fade into the dust of history and become only so much debris and broken monuments for archaeologists.

Sadly, Jesus also saw destruction waiting for Jerusalem because of the rejection of him and his message. Once as he and his disciples left Jerusalem, the disciples looked back at the city and marveled at the beauty of the temple. Jesus told them, “As for what you see here, the time will come when not one stone will be left on another; every one of them will be thrown down” (Lk 21:6). Jesus had said that even the joy of having children would evaporate in the judgment of God on their unbelief. He said that in God’s judgment, women would consider those who had no children blessed. The reason for tears is not the tragic story of Jesus but the tragic story of every human who stands outside God’s grace—every human heart that does not see the cross of Christ and embrace it in faith.

Perhaps we need to shed some tears for our own situation. We know that the wages of sin is death. We are not exceptions to that rule. We are sinners. The human tragedy is that we cannot change that rule no matter what good we might do or what monuments we might erect with our lives of service. Our children inherit the same dysfunction and sin from us. Although most of us live each day denying that life will end, human life and its end call for sober reflection—even tears. We are the helpless victims trapped in the prison of sin and death.

But our human tragedy is not without hope. That hope is in the cross of Jesus. He took our place—a real, human substitute—and satisfied God’s justice. You are forgiven—declared righteous. The journey of your life, no matter how many dark valleys you experience, is not a dead end at the judgment of God. See the cross for what it is—the full payment for all your sins. Just as the wages of sin is death, so the gift of God is eternal life. Shed no tears for Jesus. Soberly consider your own failings and then cling to Jesus as your Redeemer. Amen.