



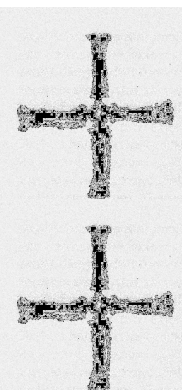
St. Luke Ev. Lutheran Church-WELS
Devotions delivered by

Pastor Anthony E. Schultz
Good Friday, April 6, 2012

First Word--Luke 23:26-34

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?" Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed. When they came to the place called the Skull, there they crucified him, along with the criminals – one on his right, the other on his left. Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.

It sounds like the plot of one of those crime scene investigation shows. The mommy is missing. Her blood on the couch and blood on the floor tiles – though you can tell someone tried to clean it. The night the mommy went missing – the whole family suddenly decided in the middle of the night – in the middle of a snow storm – to go camping. Seriously – *camping*? There is a tarp and a shovel with blood on it, too. But no one knows where the mommy is. The husband – the obvious suspect has motive, means and opportunity. He is questioned – but not arrested. He and his two sons move – literally hundreds of miles away. The next thing you know – the father does unspeakable harm to his sons – although he bungles this apparent attempt at *mercy killing* – then sets off an explosion--their home bursts into flame – and he perishes in the flames with his sons! The mommy's body is still missing. Now that's about as terrible a person as I can imagine. Would you go to prison for him? Would you suffer the consequences for his crimes? I don't even know this man! But Jesus did. Jesus took responsibility for every unspeakable crime done by people through the past 6,000 years this world has existed. Jesus died for this man's mistakes – and all my sins, too. Jesus died to forgive us all our sins! How amazing is that – that Jesus should pray, "Father forgive me – for I don't understand and appreciate what I am doing?"



Second Word--Luke 23:38-43

There was a written notice above him, which read: "THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS". One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: "Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!" But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong." Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Jesus answered him, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."

When I was in College we read John Milton's epic poem, Paradise Lost. Milton's story has two narrative arcs: one of Satan (Lucifer) and another of Adam and Eve. It begins after Satan and the other rebel angels have been defeated and banished to Hell, or as it is also called in the poem, Tartarus. In Pandæmonium, Satan employs his rhetorical skill to organize his followers; he is aided by his lieutenants Mammon and Beelzebub. Belial and Moloch are also present. At the end of the debate, Satan volunteers himself to poison the newly-created Earth and God's new and most favored creation, Mankind. He braves the dangers of the Abyss alone in a manner reminiscent of Odysseus or Aeneas. After arduously traversing the Chaos outside Hell, he enters God's new material World, and later the Garden of Eden." (Wikipedia) I think it's almost impossible to imagine how wondrous Adam and Eve must have been. They were the absolute pinnacle of human beings – flawless – utterly flawless in their physical appearance. Hair even more beautiful than the hair you see on shampoo commercials – eyes that literally twinkled – teeth perfectly straight and unstained – skin that was adult – yet as soft and smooth as the proverbial baby! And yet – their greatest beauty was on the inside – a heart and mind and emotions – thoughts and attitude so pure and godly – it would make your blood sugar go up – just to stand by them. And still – they doubted – stumbled – rebelled and plunged the world into sin! And so paradise was lost. Only the second Adam could come – and live a flawless life and die an innocent death – so that – whenever we die – that day – we will be with Jesus in Paradise!

Third Word--John 19:25-27

Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciples whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Dear woman, here is your son," and to the disciples, "Here is your mother." From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.

Jesus' mother Mary was there when Jesus was on the cross. Michelangelo during the years 1498-99 sculpted a statue of Mary holding Jesus' body in her arms – after Jesus died to forgive us. It is sculpted from marble from Carrara in Italy. The nail marks and spear wound on Jesus' body are very small. Mary's face is very young – although by now Mary might have been some 50 years old – she looks very young and pretty. This is the only piece of art Michelangelo ever signed. They say Michelangelo stood in the corner of the chapel when people came to see his statue – and they gave credit to another artist. In bitterness Michelangelo wrote on a strap across Mary's gown – "Michelangelo Buonarroti made this!" They say later Michelangelo regretted doing that!

Do you have regrets? Do you have regrets about things you said – to your mom? Things you said or did to your dad? Jesus showed great love and respect for his Mom when he was dying on the cross. He looked out for her. And Jesus died on that same cross – to forgive all the times we have not been the sons and daughters we know we ought to be. Again see Jesus' perfect example. Again find comfort and peace in knowing Jesus died for parents and for children that are so often far from perfect!

Fourth Word--Matthew 27:45-49

From the sixth hour until the ninth hour darkness came over all the land. About the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi lama sabachthani?" – which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" When some of those standing there heard this, they said, "He's calling Elijah." Immediately one of them ran and got a sponge. He filled it with wine vinegar, put it on a stick and offered it to Jesus to drink. The rest said, "Now leave him alone. Let's see if Elijah comes to save him."

How many people have lived on earth – in the history of the world? The Bible doesn't say. If you Google that question – they will tell you estimates are somewhere between 69 billion and 110 billion people. That's a lot! It depends – they say – on how old is the human race? Some people say the people – kind of like us – were around in the neighborhood of 55,000 years ago. Some people say the people – pretty much like the giant apes – were here around 1,700,000 years ago. By the grace of God we know – 2,000 years back to the birth of the Savior. A thousand years before that King David. And 3,400 years before that – Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden – and the fall into sin. Jesus died on the cross for the sins of every man, woman and child who ever lived. Jesus knows all their names. They say during the Holocaust some 6 million people perished. This is pretty much beyond the capacity of the human mind to comprehend. There is a Holocaust memorial in Jerusalem – that tries to make this understandable – by reducing it. You go down a path into a room that is made of mirrors and candles. You hang on to a hand rail – in order to make your way through – without getting confused and lost. As you look around – all you see are candles – candle flames flickering all around you – above and beneath and all around you. And as you make your way midst all these flickering lights – they repeat the names of just 6 children – their first name, middle name, last name. The names of their parents – their birth date and birth place and the date and place of their death. 6 small children – 6 little people who were real – with real parents – born in the real world – and put to death. There are between 6 and 7 billion people alive in the world right now. Jesus knows their names – their birth place – and when and where and how they will die. Jesus knows their time of grace. And Jesus knows all their sins and mistakes – the failures and shortcomings – day in and day out. For all their sins – my sins and your failures and hurtful mistakes – Jesus suffered. His holy Heavenly Father turned his back on his Son – as he paid for the sins of the world!

Fifth Word--John 19:28,29

Later, knowing that all was now completed, and so that the Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, "I am thirsty." A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus' lips.

Scripture fulfilled – prophecy fulfilled – one by one. Was Jesus thinking of Psalm 69 verse 21? They put gall in my food and gave me vinegar for my thirst. The Concordia Self-study Bible says: *Vivid metaphors for the bitter scorn they made him eat and drink when his whole being craved for the nourishment and refreshment of comfort. The authors of the Gospels especially Matthew suggest that the suffering expressed in this verse foreshadowed Christ's suffering on the cross.* Jesus quite literally fulfilled this picture – as he drank wine vinegar mixed with gall – bitter indeed! Have you ever been thirsty – really thirsty? If you have the flu – one of the things doctors worry about – is that you don't become dehydrated! One thing you can do – if you think you might be dehydrated is pinch the skin on the back of your hand. When you let go – does it quickly go back in place – or does it stay a pinch? If it doesn't go back – chances are pretty good – you are dehydrated. You need water – and electrolytes and so? I can still remember as a child coming in from recess – standing in line by the water cooler – drinking, drinking, drinking water until Mrs. Neumeister said, "Next!" – and you had to stop! Jesus knew the most painful thirst – that we might be refreshed. Remember King David's words – **"The LORD is my Shepherd, I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures. He leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul!"** Here is the refreshment of the Gospel when our sins make us thirsty. Jesus is the living water – that refreshes your immortal soul!

Sixth Word--John 19:30

When he had received the drink, Jesus said, "It is finished." With that he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Finished? When you write a sermon – when is it finished? You can read it over and over again – looking for ways to make it better – the words more precise – the words more efficient. When I was a vicar my Bishop used to go into his office between services and study it again and again – trying to make it better. You can work on it – over and over again and again – even in your sleep in the night. But then the Church bell rings – and it's time to make the sermon. Watch cooking shows – and they chop and slice and dice and sear in hot pans and char on the grill – those little black criss/cross marks and drizzle on the sauce. And time's up – and they hold up their hands and back up – only to realize they forgot one of the basket ingredients – and they get chopped! Finished! Time has run out. And again and again – sinful human beings have come up short! But not the Lord Jesus! Every sin – each mistake – every trespass – every transgression – every iniquity – every painful hurtful thought or word or action – all the good we have left unfinished – covered with the innocent blood of the very Lamb. For all we have left unfinished – Jesus cries out – with a strong voice – it is finished! And it is!

Seventh Word--Luke 23:33-46

When they came to the place called the Skull, there they crucified him, along with the criminals – one on his right, the other on his left. Jesus said, “Father forgive them for they do not know what they are doing.” And they divided up his clothes by casting lots. The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, “He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Christ of God, the Chosen One.” The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar and said, “If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself.” There was a written notice above him, which read: THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS. One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: “Aren’t you the Christ? Save yourself and us!” But the other criminal rebuked him, “Don’t you fear God,” he said, “since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.” Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” Jesus answered him, “I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.” It was now about the sixth hour, and darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour, for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Jesus called out with a loud voice, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.” When he had said this, he breathed his last.

There was a soldier in Afghanistan with a very gentle heart. From time to time he would get one of those packages – *comfort stuff* – like post-it notes and pens and candies – like M & Ms – melt in your mouth – not in your hands – in the heat! When this soldier would get these packages – he would take most of the things he got – and set them aside – to give to little children – who needed it more than he did – he liked to say.

The other day he was on patrol – along with one of these really massive armored vehicles – built to resist the most powerful Improvised Explosive Devices. They were moving right along – harder to hit a moving target – and so? There were some little children on the road – in the way. They started to run off the road – and then one little girl ran back – into harm’s way. This soldier scooped her up to save her. She was saved – at the cost of his life. Would you do that? Oh, we would say – if it was our daughter – our granddaughter – with the help of God – yes, we would die to save our granddaughter. We love her more than life itself. Jesus died for you and for me. Because Jesus loves you more than life itself! Jesus loves you and died a most tortured death to save you. Good Friday is over. Easter is coming. Amen!

Pastor Anthony E. Schultz