

St. Luke Ev. Lutheran Church
Sermon by Pastor Anthony E. Schultz
Lenten Vesper #6.

March 20, 2013

Luke 23:39-43 NASB

³⁹ One of the criminals who were hanged *there* was hurling abuse at Him, saying, "Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!" ⁴⁰ But the other answered, and rebuking him said, "Do you not even fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? ⁴¹ And we indeed *are suffering* justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong." ⁴² And he was saying, "Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom!" ⁴³ And He said to him, "Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise."



People of God – rescued from the flaming lake of fire in hell by the innocent blood of the very Lamb of God:

I read this week about a boy named Joshua – just twelve years old. Joshua was swimming in the ocean by **Napier in New Zealand**. Joshua was playing in the water with his friends – when he was caught by a wave and swept out to sea. His two friends tried to catch him and pull him to safety – but the waves were too big and the undertow too strong. Joshua tried to swim to shore – but said it was like being in a washing machine – the water overwhelming him. People tried to catch him – to pull him to safety – but they couldn't keep a hold of him. Finally Joshua's friend – named **Hikiroa** – 13 years old grabbed Joshua – and someone grabbed Hikiroa – and someone grabbed them – and before you know it – there was a human chain – each person hanging on to the next until more than a dozen people were literally holding on for dear life! By now Joshua was just about unconscious – completely helpless – as people pulled him to safety – some his best friends – some people who didn't even know him. People who just knew someone was in desperate need! What a wonderful thing – that people didn't just stand there. People helped! Joshua was saved! One person saved from being swept away. Jesus saved you and me – so that we are not swept away because of our sins! This afternoon – this last Wednesday Lenten Vesper we consider:

Names of Wondrous Love – THE WAY!



1. We are sinners who lost our way

2. Jesus is the only Way!

There is – just outside the city walls of Jerusalem – a hill – with creamy stones sticking out – so that with just a little imagination you would agree – this hill looks like a gigantic Skull! This was one of the places where the Romans liked to execute Jews. It was a horrible place. Here they hammered nails through Jesus' hands and feet. They may well have put ropes around Jesus' arms to hold him up. And yet – part of the genius of crucifixion was the fact that a person could not hold themselves up – to get a decent breath. Very quickly carbon dioxide would build up in your body – causing your muscles to cramp – unbearable pain. Eventually a person would suffocate – your body going into shock – your heart unable to bear the pressure and strain. It was as they say – profound in its simplicity! As we catch up in spirit with the Lord Jesus – he is hanging on the cross – between two robbers – two thieves – two malefactors – two evil doers!

³⁹ One of the criminals who were hanged there was hurling abuse at Him, saying, "Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!" Even as he was dying on the cross – Jesus' enemies mocked and ridiculed him. God's Word says, "Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying, 'You who are going to destroy the temple and built it in three days, save yourself! Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!' In the same way the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders mocked him, 'He saved other,' they said, 'but he can't save himself! He's the king of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, "I am the Son of God."'" On the way to the cross – some women who saw the pitiful carpenter turned Rabbi – and they wept for him. They had pity, compassion, sympathy for this man with the crown of thorns and the scourged back – carrying his cross – stumbling and falling under the weight of the burden until he could not carry it a single step farther. But once Jesus was nailed to the cross – quite literally dying – still his enemies did not have enough. Oh, they shook their heads in mock pity – what a tragedy – what a tragic thing to see – this man who was going to knock down Herod's Temple and put it all back together over a three day weekend – unable to save himself. Really – all Jesus needed to do was hop down from the cross – push or will the nails to come out – hop down to the ground – it wasn't that far – and they would all bow down and worship him. Come down from the cross – if he was who he claimed to be – the eternal and all-powerful Son of God. The chief priests – the men who had for many years offered the lambs and sheep, the goats and bulls and turtle doves – the sweetest

wine and the purest olive oil and wheat baked into the finest bread – of all people should have known better. Here before their very eyes – the words of the prophet Isaiah were finding fulfillment. Jesus was wounded for our transgressions – crushed for our failure to measure up. The punishment that bought us peace was upon Jesus – and by his wounds we are healed. We all like sheep have gone astray – each of us has turned to his own way. The LORD made Jesus the scapegoat – carrying our guilt out into the wilderness to die all alone! They mocked Jesus, too. The elders – the men with the grey and white hair – the longest beards – the deepest wrinkles – the spots on their hands – and the weaknesses that come from growing old. They, too should have known better. The men that had been to the Temple again and again – to Synagogue again and again – to hear God’s Word read and explained and discussed by the Rabbi. They should have known better – too. But they didn’t! **“He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, ‘I am the Son of God.’”**

³⁹ **One of the criminals who were hanged there was hurling abuse at Him, saying, “Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!”** One of the criminals – a malefactor – a doer of evil – mocked Jesus too. Are you not the Christ – the Messiah – the Anointed One – the Promised Redeemer? Aren’t you supposed to be the Savior? Save yourself – and save me from this most tortured death! ⁴⁰ **But the other answered, and rebuking him said, “Do you not even fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?”** ⁴¹ **And we indeed are suffering justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.”** Finally – after all that has happened in the Garden of Gethsemane – the sham trial and kangaroo court of **Annas then Caiaphas – then Pilate – then Herod and back to Pilate** – who declares Jesus innocent – yet does nothing to protect him. Finally someone speaks up for Jesus. One of the criminals dying beside Jesus speaks up. He confesses he deserves to die this tortured death because he is a criminal. But Jesus hasn’t done anything wrong! Jesus never made the least mistake. And Jesus **always accomplished everything good.** Imagine – at the end of every day – Jesus had complete everything that needed to be done. Every day before he went to sleep – Jesus did absolutely everything that needed to be done. Only Jesus was completely innocent. And then he suffered for all my flaws and failures!

⁴² **And he was saying, “Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom!”** The thief on the cross knew he was going to die. At our home we like to watch comedies – after a day of thinking about the devil, the world and my sinful flesh – about the wages of sin is death – and seeing the painful hurtful results of sin – sometimes it’s good to think about Jesus’ unconditional forgiving

love and then to watch something that is clever – even funny. We were watching a Frasier rerun. **Eddie the puppy** – seemed depressed and all the characters talked about sadness, depression – and ultimately death. Frasier quoted T.S. Elliot who once wrote, **"I am no prophet--and here's no great matter; I have seen the moment of my greatness flicker, I have seen the eternal Footman hold my coat, and snicker, and in short, I was afraid"** The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock by T.S. Elliot What does that mean? Do you know and understand? Every day the news reports death and destruction. The sinkhole in Florida – that swallowed the man who thought he was safe in his own bed. Day after day – people are killed in Iraq and Afghanistan and Pakistan – when suicidal car bombers blow themselves up – and anyone who happens to be within the range of the shrapnel. People are in a bar in Mexico – on spring break when someone shoots them. There is death all around us – the temptation is to think it always happens to someone else. If today is the day Jesus calls me or you – we know he will never forget us. He will remember us – because he has engraved us on the palms of his hail marked hands. Jesus' forgiving love will never fail!

⁴³ **And He said to him, "Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise."** Paradise! The Greek word is: **τῷ παραδεισῷ. Paradise** – with the flavor of a garden – like the Garden of Eden. Have you been to formal gardens? Or have you been to a very nice country club golf course? They literally try to make it as perfect as is humanly possible. They plant the best grass seed – fertilize it – roll it – punch little holes in it so the water soaks in – and air gets in. Then they mow it and trim it. They pull weeds out by hand. They will literally get down on their hands and knees with a scissors and snip little blades of grass – like they were **trimming whiskers on a moustache!** Nothing is left to chance. If something is fatally flawed – remove and replace – without mercy! Still because this world and all the plants and animals and people who live in it are flawed by sin – nothing is quite perfect. There is no paradise here. Here there is no end to what could go wrong. I remember quite a few years ago – a little grandma who sang in Choir – came to practice one day – with one of those **Velcro boots** on her foot. Seems she was walking through her back yard – by one of their **little apple trees** – accidentally stepped on an apple and twisted her ankle. Can't you just hear it – feel it go snap?! Go out in the back yard – and if it's getting late in the day – it's the mosquitoes – they buzz in your ear – and they bite you – quite literally suck out your blood! In the middle of the day – it's the bees and they sting you – the wasps come – and they poke you again and again – huge bees – like flying ping pong balls – buzzing in the flowers! Then there are the snakes – thick snakes when you try to cut the grass. I remember one

snake on our driveway way back in Love's Park. I went in the garage to get a long handled shoves to smack it – and it got up and hissed at me – like come just a little closer and I'm bite you! This is not to mention the field mice in the corn field – the rats by the dumpsters behind businesses. It's hard to imagine Paradise – a garden where there is no danger – no threat – no possibility of anything ever going wrong! To be safe by Jesus in Paradise – where everything is flawless and pleasant and wonderful beyond words to say!

"Today you shall be with Me in Paradise." Last week an 18 year old was driving – **making dough-nuts in a church parking lot.** What could possible go wrong? Well he spun out of control – crashed into the side of the church. His car caught fire – and the **church caught fire** – and the driver was stuck in the car – unconscious! He was helpless to save himself. The police came by – saw him – and rescued him – **dragging him out of the car** and taking him to the hospital where he is in serious condition. When he gets out of the hospital he will get a ticket for reckless driving and have to pay some **\$10,000 for damage** to the Church! Earthly rescues – human rescues can't begin to compare with Jesus rescuing us from the forever fires of hell. Jesus willingly gave up his life to save wretched sinners like the two criminals that died beside him. Jesus died and rose again – to forgive all our sins – so that we might live with him in Heaven. Jesus is the Way – the only Way to Heaven! Amen!
To God alone all glory!