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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
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Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
April 9, 2014
6th Midweek Lent

Scripture Lessons: Psalm 110 Passion: Jesus' Suffering
on the Cross

Hymns: 175; 390; 173; 564

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and
our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Matthew 27:3-10

Then Judas, His betrayer, seeing that He had been condemned, was remorseful and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, 4 saying, "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood." And they said, "What is that to us? You see to it!" 5 Then he threw down the pieces of silver in the temple and departed, and went and hanged himself. 6 But the chief priests took the silver pieces and said, "It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, because they are the price of blood." 7 And they consulted together and bought with them the potter's field, to bury strangers in. 8 Therefore that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day. 9 Then was fulfilled what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, saying, "And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the value of Him who was priced, whom they of the children of Israel priced, 10 and gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord directed me."

(NKJV)

This is the Word of God!

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

In Christ Jesus, our crucified Savior, dear fellow Redeemed.

INTRO: Remarkable incidents from Jesus' Passion

This evening's meditation is based upon a dark, indeed a very dark incident from the Passion of our Lord. However, it is noteworthy because God set it before us not only as lesson in the darkness of sin but because out of the darkest hours of this world a light shined. There was also a promise of life, a hope for the better things that are held in store for the children of God. May the Spirit of God enlighten our hearts as we consider --

THEME: The Purchase of the Potter's Field.

This incident was foretold by the prophet Zechariah as well as the prophet Jeremiah, with Zechariah presenting the clearer details of what was to transpire, that the purchase price for the potter's field was the price that was paid Judas for betraying Jesus, and Jeremiah presenting the spiritual blessings of this incident.

It is out of this relationship to the betrayer Judas that we are brought to see this Potter's Field as --

I. A Field of Blood.

Our text tells us that Judas was remorseful when he saw that Jesus was condemned. One wonders what Judas had been thinking before that. Surely he was blinded by the money, but one wonders, had Judas thought ahead to what the outcome of his betrayal of Jesus would be? It is clear that on previous occasions Judas had seen Jesus

escape from His enemies, but did Judas really think that Jesus was going to escape once more? Judas did clearly indicate who Jesus was, so that in the dark of night a mistake wasn't made. Judas did instruct the armed mob to take Jesus securely. It is clear that Judas didn't want anything to go so much off plan that he would have to give the money back. Perhaps Judas didn't think that the chief priests and Sanhedrin would actually condemn Jesus. Perhaps Judas thought that outcome beyond the realm of possibility. Then, when Judas saw that Jesus was actually condemned, then he regretted his betrayal. Perhaps Judas wasn't thinking so clearly ahead of time.

Isn't that what the lust for money has often done? Isn't that exactly what Paul warns of when he wrote

1 Timothy 6:10 "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows."

No one fits this better than Judas. In his greediness he pierced himself through with many sorrows! With regret he seeks out the chief priests, but it is too late to undo what has been done. And when Judas confesses that he has "**sinned by betraying innocent blood**" (v.4) he finds no peace in his confession. He finds no relief in throwing the money back into the temple. That precious money was suddenly disgusting to Judas, but even being rid of the money could not relieve his guilt. And that was how Judas bought the potter's field; by throwing the money back on the temple floor the money that was ultimately used to buy that piece of ground on the south end of the valley of Hinnom where they would bury strangers.

Judas did not turn back to Jesus. Judas could not turn back to Jesus. He could not find repentance because he did not believe that he could be forgiven. Remorse turned into despair, and despair led to the fulfillment of the sad prophecy of the Lord, **that it would be better for Judas if he had not been born** (Matthew 26:24). Our text reports that Judas' resolution of the matter came at the end of a rope. He hanged himself. Luke reports in Acts chapter one that when Judas hanged himself he threw himself headlong over the precipice above the Valley of Hinnom, and so died a gory death. But the worst lay ahead for him. His death didn't bring an end to the darkness, but took him down to the utter darkness of eternal death.

And so it is with sin when there is no true repentance. There is only darkness, **outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth** (Matthew 8:12). And this is surely how this potter's field came to be known as "the field of blood." It was not only purchased with blood money, but it was a bloody and sad end of life for Judas that happened in the same field that was purchased with that thirty pieces of silver that had been so precious to Judas, but ended up being his undoing.

That is the seduction of sin. We blind ourselves to the tragic ending that sin brings. We think only of fulfilling the desires of the flesh. We don't think clearly about the danger and harm that comes with sin, that always, always, always comes with sin. We forget that sin brings death, horrible death, eternal death.

One would think that all this could have been avoided if only someone had pointed Judas to the Lord in his spiritual crises. So we see the potter's field is also –

II. A Field of Hypocrisy.

Of course Judas turned to the chief priests in his remorse. They were the ones that had put Judas up to the betrayal; they had given him the money he suddenly found so repulsive. They were also the ones that could stop this madness. With one word from them Pilate would set Jesus free. That was obvious to everyone! It was certainly obvious to Judas.

What is more significant, although Judas may have missed it, was that the priests were the ones to whom a guilt ridden soul should turn in the darkness of sin's despair. Judas had turned to the right people, at least they should have been the right people to point Judas to a forgiving God in his hour of darkness. Judas confessed his sin to them, "**I have sinned by betraying innocent blood**" (v.4), but they didn't really care and didn't wish to be bothered by such concerns. They replied: "**What is that to us? You see to it!**" (v.4). But that was their job! They were appointed by God to serve as His priests, to hear the people's confession, and to point them to God. They were to take the sacrifices and sin offerings brought by the people and offer them to God, and then to deliver the Lord's assurance of His love and forgiveness that was to be found in the coming Messiah. But they had rejected the Messiah! They had turned away from Jesus. They were far more interested in securing political power than ministering to guilt-ridden souls.

"**You see to it!**" But that's the problem! The sinner can't take away his own sins. He can't take care of the problem by himself. By himself he will only fall deeper and deeper into the abyss of outer darkness.

But they knew how to keep up appearances! The money Judas threw back at them, well they knew that they couldn't accept "blood money" for use in the temple. Ill-gotten gain was forbidden from donations to God and His temple, and rightly so! But they were in the midst of a horrific sin! If Judas did nothing else, he did call this sin to their attention! Oh, no, that would never do. As long as they maintained the pretense of righteousness and kept up appearances, everything would be fine.

And so they had the money used to buy the potter's field as a burial place for strangers; that is the poor, the homeless, and any gentiles who traveled to Jerusalem. And so we can see that the Potter's field was indeed a field of hypocrisy.

But God spoke of this incident before us through the prophets. The Lord used this incident as means of communicating the salvation that would arise from all this darkness, that we might see the potter's field as --

III. A Field of Hope.

Matthew 27: 9-10 Then was fulfilled what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, saying, "And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the value of Him who was priced, whom they of the children of Israel priced, 10 and gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord directed me."

It was important that this prophecy be remembered in connection with Jesus' death. Jeremiah's prophetic life opens our eyes to the significance we should draw from this event. In Zechariah we read:

Zechariah 11:12-13 "Then I said to them, "If it is agreeable to you, give me my wages; and if not, refrain." So they weighed out

for my wages thirty pieces of silver. 13 And the Lord said to me, “Throw it to the potter”—that princely price they set on me. So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the Lord for the potter.”

Jeremiah had been instructed by the Lord that he should buy a potter’s field from his uncle. This instruction came from the Lord while Nebuchadnezzar was building siege works around the walls of Jerusalem, and Jeremiah was sitting in a Jewish dungeon, for his preaching. His cousin came to Jeremiah with Jeremiah in prison, and asked him to buy this field when everything was about to be destroyed. Surely the uncle was desperate for money to get food, but who would be foolish enough to buy land when the King of Babylon was destroying everybody and everything.

The Lord told Jeremiah to buy the potter’s field because after many years the Lord would deliver His people from captivity, and they would thrive again in this land. The Lord brought light to darkness. And the Lord continued to explain to Jeremiah that this deliverance would not be merely physical or temporal, but would also be spiritual.

Jeremiah 32:38-42 They shall be My people, and I will be their God; 39 then I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear Me forever, for the good of them and their children after them. 40 And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from doing them good; but I will put My fear in their hearts so that they will not depart from Me. 41 Yes, I will rejoice over them to do them good, and I will assuredly plant them in this land, with all My heart and with all My soul.’ 42 “For thus says the Lord: ‘Just as I have brought all this great calamity on this people, so I will bring on them all the good that I have promised them.

The word of the Lord was fulfilled. Good would come out of all this darkness of the day when Jesus was condemned to die. God would call His people out of the lands to which they had been scattered, and He would make an everlasting covenant with them.

We have this covenant with God in Christ Jesus. He has not turned away from doing us good, but in Christ crucified He has taken away all our sins. Out of the darkness of that day has come a great light. There is hope and a future. That is the message the Lord would have us know in our hearts. That is the message with which the Lord dispels the darkness of our sins, and the guilt and condemnation which we have brought upon ourselves.

The Lord used the ransom price of Jesus' blood, far more valuable than thirty pieces of silver, to purchase our salvation. Even as we see the Scriptures fulfilled, and the potter's field purchased, even so we may know the everlasting covenant of peace we have with God, and that we shall live with Him in the glories of eternal life.

AMEN.

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.