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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
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Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
April 18, 2014
Good Friday

Scripture Lessons: Passion: Jesus' Death & Burial; Psalm 32

Hymns: 171; 153; 151:1,6,7; 552:1,5-8

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

Sermon Text: Matthew 27:50-54

50 And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit. 51 Then, behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth quaked, and the rocks were split, 52 and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; 53 and coming out of the graves after His resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many. 54 So when the centurion and those with him, who were guarding Jesus, saw the earthquake and the things that had happened, they feared greatly, saying, "Truly this was the Son of God!" (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 of Good Friday we come to the climax of Jesus' passion. We consider not only His sufferings upon the cross, but the ultimate end of that suffering, what many would have considered the inevitable end of that suffering, which is of course

Jesus' death. From one perspective it was not inevitable, and that is in this way, that Jesus was forced to the cross, and that His life was taken from Him. He was the divine the Son of God and had demonstrated way earlier out in Gethsemane that no man took His life from Him. He gave His life for us at Calvary. Then again it was inevitable, but only because it was according to the gracious good will of our God and our Savior that He should die. His death was anything but ordinary. It was remarkable, and with the Spirit's direction from Holy Scripture may we this Good Friday evening meditate upon the --

THEME: Remarkable Signs connected with Jesus' Death.

First let us look at

I. His Manner of Death.

By that I don't mean the way in which Jesus was put to death by crucifixion, although many an edifying sermon has been preached on this alone. No, I am referring to the way in which Jesus entered into death. In the opening verse of our text we read:

Matthew 27:50 And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit."

We know that just before Jesus died He spoke His last two words from the cross. I don't believe it wrong at all to associate Matthew's words with those dying words of Jesus. This was not a cry of anguish or a death scream that the Spirit desires for us to comprehend. NO, not at all. It was the strength of the Lord Jesus, especially the spiritual strength of our Redeemer that is communicated in these words. When Jesus had fulfilled all that was required of Him for our salvation except the actual passing into physical death, He proclaimed that truth with power, "**It is finished!**"(John 19:30), Then He cried again with a loud voice, "**Father into Your hands I commit My spirit**" (Luke 23:46), and then He yielded up His spirit.

Remarkable. And those who were present at the cross took note. His life was not drained out of Him by all the sufferings and abuse, and the horrors of crucifixion. No, Jesus gave His life! Jesus yielded His spirit to His Father in heaven, and so He completed the

sacrifice for our sins. He had endured the dregs of hell in the God forsakenness of the cross, and then He died, going into temporal death that He might show us the path to eternal life. The wonders of grace secured by Jesus' death are revealed for us in –

II. The Remarkable Miracles that Occurred when Jesus Died.

Matthew 27:51-53 Then, behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth quaked, and the rocks were split, 52 and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; 53 and coming out of the graves after His resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many.

That veil or curtain in the temple was heavy. It prevented anyone from seeing into that room in the temple called the Most Holy Place, which represented the presence of God. The curtain itself represented the barrier erected by our sin that separated us from God. At the moment of Jesus' death it was torn in two from top to bottom. Imagine the reaction of the priests who were on duty at that moment conducting the beginning evening prayers! This is remarkable because this was no accident, neither was it caused by the simultaneous earthquake. This was a statement from God in heaven regarding the death of His Son. **“We are reconciled to God through the death of His Son”** (Romans 5:10)! We now have open access to the throne of God. We may come before Him unafraid and purified. Restored to His family we may boldly seek grace to help in time of need.

This was a great and momentous moment in world history. And that is the message that is delivered to us in the earthquake. Our text reports that there was a mighty earthquake and the rocks were split. Every one present in Jerusalem and the territory surrounding Judea must have felt the earth move, but those who were present at Golgotha knew that it was connected to Jesus' death. God's judgment was proclaimed by this earthquake. Sin has been vanquished. The powers of darkness are defeated forevermore!

And as for death, well the final miracle at Jesus' death makes all the statement that needs to be made about what Jesus' death did to the power of death. **“Graves were opened; and many bodies of**

the saints who had fallen asleep were raised” (v.52). This remarkable miracle is a real jaw dropper. The Spirit doesn’t answer all the questions that come to mind when we hear this report. He wants us to focus on the power of Jesus’ death and its effect on death. Jesus destroyed the power of death. Yes, we will be talking about this much more on Easter morning with the power and truth of the resurrection, but Jesus’ death was the end of the power of death.

Remember why and how death came into the world. It was not there at the beginning. It was not God’s way of making the world, as theistic evolutionists would have us believe. NO! Death came because of sin. Adam sinned, **“through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned” (Romans 5:12).** Jesus’ death removed the curse of sin for all time. And so we read in --

Hebrews 2:14-15 Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, 15 and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.

That was the message that this resurrection miracle had at the moment of Jesus’ death. The power of the devil had indeed been broken and the fear of death need never ever bother us again. This message of believers rising from the dead must have made quite a stir on Easter morning when they made their way into Jerusalem and visited their families. From that time forth they knew life and salvation in the fullness of the glory Jesus has secured for us in His sufferings and death.

The testimony of these events at Jesus’ death made an impression. We know many still denied the truth about Jesus, but the truth was noted well as is heard in --

III. The Centurion and Roman Guard’s Confession. .

Finally, let us turn our attention to the Roman guard. It would appear that it was a bit larger of a detachment of soldiers than would be usually assigned to such a crucifixion, but we are told

that when this was all over a large crowd smote their breasts and returned to the city. Considering the size of the crowd and all that was going on out there at Calvary it is no surprise that the officer in charge of these soldiers would be present to make sure that all stayed orderly and under control. This Centurion was there with his men and observed all the goings on associated with Jesus' crucifixion. He saw and sat through the hours of darkness. He heard the taunts of the chief priests and heard Jesus pray for the forgiveness of His enemies. He heard the interchange between the penitent malefactor to Jesus' right and the Lord, and how Jesus assured the condemned man that he would be with the Lord in Paradise yet that day. He saw the manner of Jesus' death and was surely impressed by it. He felt the violence of the earthquake and how it tore at the earth in the moment of Jesus' death.

He weighed the evidence, and came to the only possible conclusion: all that he had heard about this Jesus was true. This was a righteous man. This was the Son of God! This was not his opinion alone. Our text tells us that the men under his charge were quick to agree with their commanding officer. They found the death of Christ remarkable. The remarks they made reflect more than superstitious fears because of the miracles. If that was all this was there would be no point in the Spirit sharing this with us and in the accounts of three of the gospels. Surely there were many who were merely frightened by the events. We are told that there were many who simply smote their breasts and left in silence.

The Roman guard including the Centurion found Jesus' death to be remarkable, and so they confessed to the truth of what they saw. Was this a confession of saving faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior? Perhaps we can't say that with an absolute certainty, but their hearts were moved. They knew in their hearts that this was no normal man, but rather the Son of God who came to earth and who presented God's love to a fallen mankind even, or especially in His death.

Do we see the truth, and the power of saving truth in all these events which are tied to Jesus' death? Surely it is remarkable. So many today have chosen to explain away the miracles at Jesus' death. Many today would have us believe this is all coincidence. There is no coincidence here. It was all vital powerful testimony to

the wonder of the cross, to the wonder of God's Son dying for us and for our salvation. It was the Lord's intent for this to make an impression upon the hearts of men. And so it did, and not just Jewish hearts. It made an indelible impression upon the hearts of a Roman Centurion and the detachment of men under his charge. It was God's intent that it should make a similar impression upon our hearts yet today. Through the inspired record of the events surrounding Jesus' death the Holy Spirit has worked in our hearts the certainty of faith that this Jesus is the Christ the Son of God who gave Himself in death there upon the cross, for us and for our salvation. This is a great and powerful truth that leads us not only to remark with the Roman soldiers, but confess concerning Jesus, "Certainly this was a righteous Man" (Luke 23:47). "Truly this was the Son of God" (v.54).

AMEN.

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