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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
March 13, 2016
5th Sunday in Lent

Lessons: Hebrews 9:16-28, Passion: Jesus' Trial before Pilate

Hymns: 149; 167; 175; 151:1,7 (248:1-3)

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

Sermon Text: Matthew 12:40

“For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.” (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

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

In Christ Jesus, Who gave Himself into death for us, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: Jesus said:

As we consider some of the statements that Jesus made concerning His passion we are granted a richer appreciation of the sacrifice which Jesus made for us on

the cross. Of course our series of Lenten meditations is but a small sampling of the short statements Jesus made concerning His death, however each of these selected statements bring us closer to Jesus as our Redeemer and the comfort that the gospel brings us. We are not only seeing Jesus' sufferings, but His determination, His love and grace, and His care for us as He goes before us leading us on the one path to our heavenly home.

So this morning we consider another of the statements Jesus made concerning His death and burial, and we are reminded of the vital truth which we confess in the Apostles' Creed --

THEME: He was Crucified Dead and Buried.

The words of our text reveal that Jesus understood perfectly what lay before Him.

I. Jesus Would Die for our Sins.

The leaders of the Jew had continually challenged Jesus to prove that He was the Christ. Yet when He did perform miracles which were clear signs of His divine identity, they endeavored only to find fault, and to criticize.

In the verses preceding our text, Matthew reports how the Pharisees attempted to discredit Jesus because as they walked past a field of grain He allowed His disciples to take a few handfuls of grain from the stalk and rub it in their hands, and then pop it in their mouths on the Sabbath Day. The Pharisees saw this as the work of harvesting and threshing, and a clear violation of the Sabbath. Jesus corrected them with an example of Scripture regarding the purpose of ceremonial law.

Matthew then recounts how Jesus healed a man with a withered hand on that same Sabbath, as the scribes and Pharisees were watching seeking to find fault. Jesus challenge them to answer whether it was lawful to do good on the Sabbath. Matthew also reports how Jesus cast an evil spirit from its victim restoring the man's sight and ability to speak.

All these were clear signs that Jesus was the Messiah, but His enemies rejected these signs and refused to believe, even casting aspersions on the Spirit which ruled Jesus' heart. Then they turned right around and demanded a sign from the Lord. The words of our text formed Jesus' response. The sign which they would receive would be connected to His death and burial.

We however have been blessed by the Holy Spirit who has opened our understanding that we might comprehend the Scriptures (Luke 24:46). What the Spirit opens to us is how Jesus understood what lay before Him. He knew He was going to die. This wasn't simply a matter of Jesus being fatalistic or even simply discouraged, or being afraid of His enemies and what they were capable of doing to Him. This was a clear understanding of all that was going to happen and why it was necessary, and then going forward to fulfill His mission of securing our salvation. We read of this also in Mark's gospel.

Mark 8:31-33 “And He began to teach *the disciples* that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. 32 He spoke this word openly. Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him. 33 But when He had turned around and looked at

His disciples, He rebuked Peter, saying, ‘Get behind Me, Satan! For you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men.’”

Jesus understood His mission and not only accepted it, but taught it to His disciples, preparing them for what was to come. They however saw this as a bad thing, as something Jesus should not even think about.

Sadly many today prefer to think of Jesus’ ministry as Peter did, being mindful of things of men. They would attempt to redefine what Jesus was about, that He sets an agenda for social justice, alleviating poverty in this world. They deny that Jesus came to suffer and die for us and for our salvation. Many see the preaching of the cross as gory, primitive, and negative.

Indeed it is foolishness to them, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God and the wisdom of God (1 Corinthians 1:18, 24). Jesus died for us, in our place, on account of our sin that we might be delivered from the wrath to come. Jesus knew that He must die and be buried if we were to be saved, but --

II. Jesus Went to the Grave with Hope.

Jesus understood that this was not to be the end of Him. Even though both friend and foe alike thought His death on the cross was the end of Him, Jesus knew otherwise. He referenced the Biblical account of the Prophet Jonah. Jonah, who had attempted to run and hide from the mission God gave him, knew that only by his being thrown into the sea would the rest of the ship’s passengers be saved. He insisted that that the ship’s crew cast him into the sea. He sank down to the bottom of the

sea so that he became entangled in the sea weed. Surely Jonah and all his shipmates thought this was the end of Jonah's life. However God knew better. God had prepared that great fish so that it would be able to swallow Jonah without harming him. Indeed, God preserved Jonah's life within the fish's belly for three days before Jonah was miraculously spewed out onto dry land. Remarkable! Unheard of! Something that had never before happened, and yet Jonah was delivered from death by the power of God.

So Jesus declared of His own death and burial that it would be like Jonah. Yes, He would die upon the cross and Jesus would be buried but on the third day He would come forth from the bowels of the earth. Remarkable! Unheard of! Something that had never before happened would happen with the Lord. Jesus' hope was based upon the clear Prophecy of Holy Scripture. We read in the Psalms.

Psalm 16:9-11 Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoices; My flesh also will rest in hope. ¹⁰For You will not leave my soul in Sheol, Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption. ¹¹You will show me the path of life; In Your presence *is* fullness of joy; At Your right hand *are* pleasures forevermore.”

Jesus could and did look beyond the cross, and beyond the grave. He knew the words of Holy Scripture. His body would not see corruption. His body would not molder in the ground. He would rise again. He would rise again to glory. He would know the pleasures of being at the right hand of God.

Why then should Jesus need to be buried at all if He was going to rise again? Why did Jesus need to spend the three days “in the heart of the earth?”

By this --

III. He Shows Us the Path of Life.

That path of life which Jesus walked took Him through death and through the grave. It is important that we remember the manner of Jesus' death. It is important for us to recall Jesus' last word spoken from the cross.

“When Jesus had cried out with a loud voice, He said, ‘Father, ‘into Your hands I commit My spirit.’ Having said this, He breathed His last” (Luke 23:46).

Jesus died with the confidence that His Father in heaven would take charge of His spirit even as it departed from His physical body. Jesus gave Himself into death that He might show us the path of life. Jesus was buried in the heart of the earth because that is in our future, and He would have us know that He has gone there before us. Jesus went to the cross and the grave to remove its dread power over us.

It is a significant piece of our salvation that in His great humility Jesus both died, and was buried. He walked the road that we walk on this earth. It is as we read in the epistle to the Hebrews:

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.

He was born into this world to partake of flesh and blood and live the life we live. From the opening days of His life to the very end on the cross of Calvary Jesus lived a perfect, sinless life that we might have righteousness by His fulfilling of the law. He offered Himself upon the cross to redeem us from sin's curse, and Jesus went all the way to the grave because it is from the grave that Christ will recall us. And so He would deliver us who through the fear of death were subject to Satan's bondage.

The sign of Jonah was fulfilled. Jesus was crucified, dead and buried, all on our behalf to deliver us from sin's accursed end.

AMEN.

“Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” Amen. (Romans 15:13)