

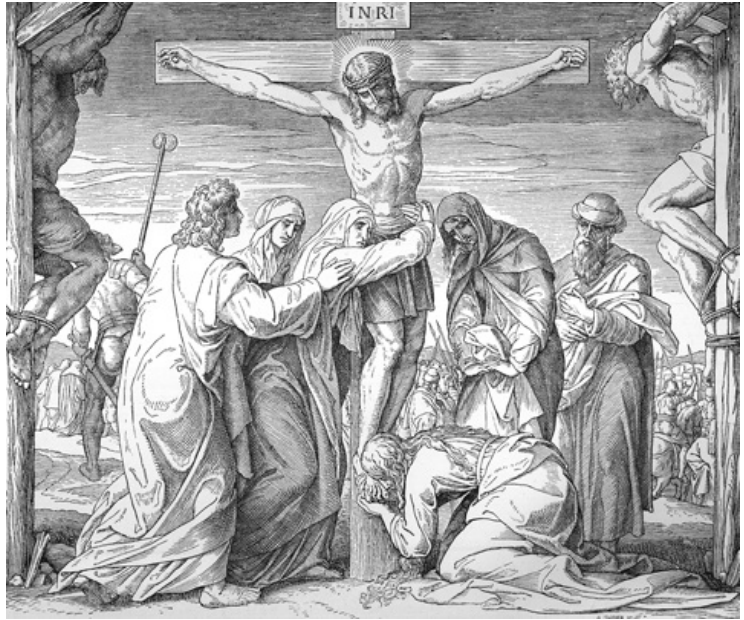
Good Friday

Text: Luke 23:47

⁴⁷The centurion, seeing what had happened, praised God and said, “Surely this was a righteous man.”

Theme: “The Righteous One Gives His Life for the Sinners”

Good Friday is a day of two divergent plans. For a while the plans of two opponents were following the same track. It was important to the devil that the world would reject our Lord, but it was also important for God’s plan that Christ would be rejected. However, when Jesus was on the cross, the two plans went their separate ways. The devil did all that He could to tempt Jesus to come down; while God’s plan was that Christ would suffer for all of our sins. Would the Righteous One Really give His innocent life for sinners like us?



I. At first everything seems to go exactly according to plan for the devil.

One person after the next was falling into temptation, which led our Lord to His cross. The chief priests and pharisees were looking for any reason to condemn Him to death. One of Jesus’ own disciples betrayed him because He loved money more than he loved his Lord. He ended up killing himself even before our Lord was dead. One of Jesus’ closest disciples denied his Lord three times and spent the night grieving what he had done. The other disciples had all run away and were locked in a room, fearing that they would be next. The guards mocked and beat our Lord, making fun of His claim to be the king. Pilate condemned Jesus to death, even though he had just declared Him to be innocent. The devil even used all of the people around the cross to tempt Jesus to come down. The rulers scoffed at Him, saying, “He saved others; let Him save Himself if He is the Christ the Chosen One.” The soldiers also mocked Him. Those who passed by mocked Him, and even both of the criminals, with whom He was crucified, mock Him at first. All of these people had fallen into the temptation to reject our Lord.

The devil must have also thought that he was doing pretty well with Jesus. Just before He was arrested, Jesus prayed three times, “*Father, if you are willing remove this cup from Me.*” He was in such agony in the Garden of Gethsemane, that His sweat became like big drops of blood falling to the ground. The devil must have thought that he was so close to getting Jesus to reject His cross and forget the whole thing.

II. But Jesus remained righteous through it all.

There were two things, which He did, that showed His righteousness:

First, He prayed for forgiveness for those who were crucifying Him. When they nailed Him to the cross, Jesus prayed, *“Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.”* Those are words that no one else in the history of this world could have spoken. After He had been falsely accused by the leaders, abandoned and betrayed by His follows, and beaten, mocked, and murdered by those whom He came to save, He prayed for their forgiveness. Even more, He was bearing all of their sins on this cross. He came to save them, and they were rejecting Him. Peter remember this when He wrote in his letter, *“Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that He might bring us to God.”* (1 Pt 1:18) He pleaded for forgiveness for those who were unjust to Him. Suddenly the devil’s plans had gone awry. He wanted Christ to curse those who were crucifying Him. Instead our Lord interceded for them and gave His innocent life for them.

Secondly, He committed His Spirit to His Father at His death. It was not only tempting to curse those who were crucifying Him. It would have also been tempting to curse His Father. Jesus was tempted to take the advice of Job’s wife when she told her husband in the midst of his sufferings, *“Curse God and die.”* There He was bearing the sins of the world because it was His Father’s will. How would you feel if your father told you, “I know that your brother broke your mother’s favorite vase, but I want you to pay for it.” We would complain that it’s not fair. We would never forget that we were made to pay for our brother’s sin. Yet, Jesus willingly bore all of our sins on the cross. He clung to His Father’s love and goodness through it all. As He was dying, He said, *“Father, into Your hands I commit My Spirit!”* Now the devil was doomed. Christ remained righteous, and His innocent death in our place brought peace again between God and man. At that very moment the curtain, that separated the Holy of Holies from the rest of the temple, was torn in two. Christ had sacrificed His righteous life as the payment for all of our sins.

II. There were two people who recognized that right away.

The first was one of the criminals who was crucified with Jesus. This man deserved death. He had taken part in some horrendous crime. In fact, he confessed that his punishment was just. At first he also found some joy in mocking Jesus, but soon he came to recognize that Jesus was righteous. He had done nothing wrong. Then He came to see Jesus as his Savior, and he asked, *“Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”* The Lord answered, *“Truly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.”* This man, who had lived a horrendous life, found forgiveness and righteousness in His Savior Jesus. His sins were forgiven, and He was made fit for heaven with the righteousness of Christ.

The other man who recognized this was the Centurion. This was probably the man who was in charge of the crucifixion. He was in charge of making Jesus carry His cross and making sure that He was nailed to the cross. He was there when the soldiers were casting lots for Jesus’ clothing and mocked Him by giving Him vinegar to drink. He was in charge of making sure that the Lord was dead. When He saw the way that Jesus died, it says that He **praised** God. Jesus’ death caused this man to come to faith. The man in charge of the crucifixion confessed that Jesus was a righteous man, even the Son of God. Even the man in charge of the Lord’s death, found peace that the Lord died for him.

III. Jesus gave His innocent life for the forgiveness of our sins too.

Throughout this lenten season we have looked at how each one of us has fallen into temptation, just like all of the people in the passion story. We are all guilty. The Bible is clear that no one is righteous. Not even one. Yet, Jesus gave His righteous life on that cross for the forgiveness of all of our sins. Don't let His payment for your sins be in vain. It doesn't matter where you have been or what you have done. Confess your sin, trust in Him as your Savior, and He will forgive your sin. He has already borne all of your sins. It would only grieve Him if you reject that full payment that He made out of love for you.

At first it seems like a great tragedy that the Righteous One gave His life for the sinners, but it was the greatest act of love that was ever committed. He gave His life for sinners like us, that we could be clothed with His righteousness. He died for us, that as He rose from the dead, we will also rise to eternal life both in our baptism and on that blessed day when He returns to bring us home with Him. May God grant us the faith of both the thief on the cross and the centurion, that we may see Him as our Savior from all of our sins.

Amen.

***Pastor Don Hougard
Benediction Lutheran Church
Milwaukee, WI
March 29, 2013***