

Lent 2018 – The Battles of Lent

"The Battle of Golgotha"

Text: Mark 15:22-32

*"Thou hast borne the smiting only that my wounds might all be whole;
Thou hast suffered, sad and lonely, rest to give my weary soul;
Yea, the curse of God enduring, blessing unto me securing.
Thousand, thousand thanks shall be, Dearest Jesus, unto Thee." Amen.*
(TLH #151)

The text for our Lenten Meditation this evening is found recorded in the Gospel of Mark, the 15th Chapter, beginning with the 22nd verse:

Mark 15:22-32 *And they brought him to the place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull).²³ And they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it.²⁴ And they crucified him and divided his garments among them, casting lots for them, to decide what each should take.²⁵ And it was the third hour when they crucified him.²⁶ And the inscription of the charge against him read, "The King of the Jews."²⁷ And with him they crucified two robbers, one on his right and one on his left.²⁸ ²⁹ And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads and saying, "Aha! You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days,³⁰ save yourself, and come down from the cross!"³¹ So also the chief priests with the scribes mocked him to one another, saying, "He saved others; he cannot save himself.³² Let the Christ, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross that we may see and believe." Those who were crucified with him also reviled him.*

This is God's Word - the verbally inspired words by which we are converted, strengthened, and sustained. That all of God's intended benefits from these holy words might be ours, so we pray, **"Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your Word is truth!"** Amen.

Dear Fellow Redeemed in Christ Jesus, who suffered so terribly because of what we had done:

This evening, in our final midweek Lenten service, we are returning to yet another familiar scene of our Lord's suffering. This evening we stand and look at *Golgotha* – "The Place of the Skull" – and we seek to recognize it as the site where our Savior fought a great battle against a rather surprising enemy – suffering.

The progression, the symmetry, of the life of our Savior is as fascinating as it is tragic. He entered the world as the envy of kings and as the wonder of his people. He left the world as a rejected outcast and criminal, forsaken by all. In the beginning, foreigners journeyed for days to honor him as a great king; in the end, foreign soldiers, as well as his own people, ridiculed and crucified him. And there are other startling similarities (or symmetry) between Jesus' early life and his crucifixion. In our text we read, **"And they brought him to the place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull).** Compare these words with others from the 2nd Chapters of Matthew and Luke: **"Joseph went up from Galilee... into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem... with Mary. So it was, that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn son... "When he arose, Joseph took the young Child and His mother by night and departed for Egypt."** Jesus began his life by being led where others wanted him to go – in an effort to save his life. He ended his life by being led by others who wanted to take his life, to a place where, as our Savior, he himself chose to go. As men gave him myrrh at the beginning of his life in honor, so also they offered him myrrh at the end of his life in dishonor. (Myrrh and wine was apparently a mixture intended to dull the pain of the crucifixion.)

Man's attitude toward Jesus changed, sometime minute by minute, yet through it all, Jesus remained constant. Though the world's perception of him shifted almost continually, his mission and his determination never wavered. He entered our world for a single purpose – to suffer and die, thereby providing our sin payment; and suffer he did, right up to the bitter end. So it is that we come this evening to the battle site of Golgotha, and our Savior's last great struggle with suffering.

We cannot help but wonder how it all came to this – to this place and to this end. How did it come to pass that One so just, so pure, and so holy could come to such a tormented end? The answer can be given in many different ways. This evening we answer by examining the progression of man's attitude toward, and expectations of, Jesus Christ.

Interestingly, the events of Jesus' crucifixion, recorded in our text for this evening, serve as almost a miniature summary of Jesus' entire life and ministry, as well as a summary of man's perception of his role in that life and ministry. In his life and in our text we find the following progression:

- 1) Man believes he has something to offer to Jesus
- 2) Man wants something *from* Jesus, but not what Jesus came to offer

3) Man wants nothing to do with Jesus, and blasphemes him in parting

While the symmetry of the beginning and end of Jesus' life is interesting, how is it significant? In the first place, mankind still today believes that he has something to offer to God in connection with Good Friday. We still possess that same natural inclination toward wanting to participate in a meaningful way with what could only be the work of our Lord Jesus. Simply put, we would like to think that we have the resources to help ease his suffering somehow, and to pay our sin-debt and to thereby help save ourselves.

Part of the wonder of Golgotha is the realization that Jesus was there to accomplish not only that which we desperately needed, but that he was absolutely and without question the only one who could do what needed to be done. We could not help. We could not assist. We offered no comfort or support of any kind. Our contribution was limited to our sin, which just magnified his suffering. We therefore rob Golgotha of its full wonder and majesty whenever we fail to recognize Jesus as our one and only hope. Jesus fought utterly alone. He suffered alone.

Translated again into practical, everyday terms, this means that our weekly church contributions had and have absolutely no effect on Good Friday. Nor do our prayers, our church attendance, or any other "good thing" that we have done. None of these has anything to do with Calvary. Does that sound obvious? It should, but in reality it is anything but. Time after time we forget that our good deeds play no role in what Jesus did for us on Golgotha. They are the Christian's faithful "thank you" for what Jesus alone could and did accomplish there.

So it is that our text begins with man again trying to offer his idea of aid to Jesus by offering him myrrh mixed with wine. Note well that Jesus refused the offer. On the cross he resolved to do battle with the full measure of the suffering that we had earned by our sins. His refusal of the mixture of wine and myrrh we recognize in part as a statement that man could in no way ease his suffering.

In fact man's idea of helping Jesus in connection with Good Friday usually proves silly to the point of embarrassment. Think how Peter tried to prevent Jesus from going to Jerusalem to suffer and die. Think how the "Sons of Thunder" (James and John) volunteered to call down the fire of heaven upon the Samaritan village that rejected Jesus. Think how Peter managed to lop off the ear of Malchus in the Garden. All of these "helps" were offered and intended to help Jesus. In the end, they all worked against Jesus' plan and were answered by Jesus with **"Get behind me**

"Satan" or **"You do not know what manner of spirit you are of"** or **"Put away your sword.."** So also Jesus dismissed man's offered aid on the cross. He wanted no numbing, no clouding, no dulling. He came to drink the cup of suffering *in our place and as our substitute*, and drink it he did.

So it was that Jesus' crucifixion, as his life itself, began with man offering gifts. Our text goes on: **"And they crucified him and divided his garments among them, casting lots for them, to decide what each should take."** This parallels the next period of Jesus' earlier life. Once human beings figured out that Jesus had something to offer, everyone suddenly wanted a piece of Jesus. The sick wanted to be healed, the lame wanted to walk, the blind wanted to see, the demon-possessed wanted freedom. Even those who had to pressing physical need, like Herod, wanted to be entertained by Jesus with some of his "tricks."

So also, even at his death, men wanted to get whatever worldly wealth they could from Jesus. We are told that it was the privilege of the soldiers to do this. Those who had to stand the long hours of guard duty carrying out the governor's execution orders were allowed to divide the earthly possession of those who were executed. Jesus had very little to argue over, which is amazing when you stop to think about it. The King of kings and Lord of lords died with nothing more than the clothes on his back. The point here is that we again find human beings trying to gain something from Jesus, but not what he came to offer.

We are certainly guilty also in this regard. Though we often fail to give him full credit for what he alone did at Golgotha (delivering us from our slavery to sin, death, and hell) we expect from him what he never promised to provide. We are incensed at the arrival of the promised hard times. *"Why me?"* Blasphemous thoughts can fill our minds – accusations that God has somehow failed in his responsibility towards us, or that he has let us down in some way. The truth is that we often expect God to remain faithful when we wander from him, but then consider him lax somehow when he allows what is necessary to call us back.

The people of Jesus' day treated him like a child's toy. When he no longer represented an asset in their minds, they simply discarded him. Do you ever do the same? Do you ever find yourself begging Jesus to fulfill the desires of your heart, and then drift away from him (at least for a time) when he grants those requests? For such ingratitude, Jesus also suffered.

Finally, our text tells us, ***And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads and saying, "Aha! You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, ³⁰ save yourself, and come down from the cross!" ³¹ So also the chief priests with the scribes mocked him to one another, saying, "He saved others; he cannot save himself. ³² Let the Christ, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross that we may see and believe." Those who were crucified with him also reviled him.*** Civilized human beings are rightly mystified and appalled at the utter cruelty and merciless barbarity of this moment. Imagine a kind and gentle human being hanging in the agony of crucifixion. What would be your reaction? Yet what was the reaction of the people in our text? It is really rather difficult for us to contemplate such callous insensitivity, such utter ruthlessness and blind animosity. Jesus, the object of their cruelty, *had shown nothing but kindness to them!* He had healed their loved ones, cast out demons, and directed them to the path of heaven. Why now, even at the very last, did they feel the need to hurl their final insults at this gentle, loving man?

The answer is that here we have caught the devil in his underwear. Here we are given perhaps the clearest and most honest picture of the true character of evil – the very evil that resides in each one of us. Here is our old Adam with all of the false humility stripped away. Here is what lies in the human heart in all its ugliness. Here you can see yourself as God the Father saw you. Hold this picture in your hearts, and marvel at the love of our Savior Jesus – his love for the unlovable. Golgotha was indeed a place of suffering – a place where the good and decent suffered untold torment for the thoroughly sinful and corrupt. Yet in our recognition of our own evil there is no despair. Instead, Jesus is magnified all the more. Here he is recognized as the one who did not suffer for the good and deserving, but for sinners. Here we recognize the One who suffered absolutely alone – and won. The result of that victory is that you and I will never have to endure such suffering, for we have been cleansed, forgiven, saved.

Thanks be to our Lord for the release, the escape, that his victory over suffering has earned for each one of us. Amen.

Weekly Hymn and Sermon Schedule

February 14

Hymns: 140 (1-4)
367, 263

Lenten Theme:
"The Battles of Lent"

*"The Battle of the
Upper Room"*

Text: John 13:1-17

February 21

Hymns: 388 (1-3, 6)
143 (1-5), 261

Lenten Theme:
"The Battles of Lent"

*"The Battle of
Gethsemane"*

Text: Mark 14:32-42

February 28

Hymns: 358, 171 (1-5)
260 (1, 4 & 6)

Lenten Theme:
"The Battles of Lent"

*"The Battle of the
High Priest's
Palace"*

Text: Mark 14:53-64

March 7

Hymns: 652, 371 (1-6)
258 (1, 3-5)

Lenten Theme:

"The Battles of Lent"

*"The Battle of
Pilate's Court"*

Text: Mark 15:1-15

March 14

Hymns: 360, 155
463 (1-2, 8)

Lenten Theme:

"The Battles of Lent"

*"The Battle of the
Streets of
Jerusalem"*

Text: Luke 23:26-31

March 21

Hymns: 153, 176
448 (1-2, 5)

Lenten Theme:

"The Battles of Lent"

*"The Battle of
Golgotha"*

Text: Mark 15:22-32



St Paul Lutheran Church

Lent 2018

"The Battles of Lent"

- The Upper Room
- Gethsemane
- The High Priest's Palace
- Pilate's Court
- The Streets of Jerusalem
- Golgotha

-Please return this bulletin to the Entry Table for use next week-

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Mid-Week Lenten Services - 2018

The Opening Hymn (As noted on the back page and on the Hymn Board)

Invocation

Pastor: *In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.*

All: (Spoken) *Amen.*

Confession and Absolution (TLH 323)

Pastor: *Acknowledging that we stand in the presence of our Holy God we humble ourselves, and in true repentance, we confess our sins:*

All:

1. With broken heart and contrite sigh, a trembling sinner, Lord, I cry.
Thy pardoning grace is rich and free - O God, be merciful to me.
2. I smite upon my troubled breast, with deep and conscious guilt oppressed;
Christ and His cross my only plea – O God, be merciful to me.
3. Nor alms nor deeds that I have done can for a single sin atone.
To Calvary alone I flee – O God, be merciful to me.

Pastor: *Jesus Christ himself has been punished for your sins. God the Father has placed upon Jesus the iniquity of us all. According to His authority, and by His command, I announce to you the divine decree of our God that all of your sins are forgiven, in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

All: And when, redeemed from sin and hell, with all the ransomed throng I dwell,
My blissful song shall ever be: God has been merciful to me.

The Reading of the Passion History

The Apostolic Creed

I believe in God the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord,
Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried.

He descended into hell.

The third day He rose again from the dead.

He ascended into heaven

and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty.

From there He will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy Christian Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.

The Pre Sermon Hymn (As noted on the back page and on the Hymn Board)

The Sermon – *The theme for our devotions this Lenten Season is*

"The Battles of Lent"

(Please turn to the back page for this evening's service details)

The Response – (Sung to the melody of Hymn 237)

1. *A mighty Fortress is our God, a trusty Shield and Weapon;
He helps us free from every need that hath us now o'ertaken.
The evil Foe means deadly woe;
Great guile and might his arms in fight;
On Earth is not his equal.*
2. *With might of ours can naught be done, soon were our loss effected;
But for us fights the Valiant One, Whom God Himself elected.
This Lord of Hosts is Jesus Christ;
Our Savior-King, our Mighty God.
He holds the field forever.*

The Prayer of the Day

The Lord's Prayer

The Benediction

P: *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
And the love of God the Father,
And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.*

C: *Amen, Amen, Amen.* (Sung by all)

The Closing Hymn (As noted on the back page and on the Hymn Board)

Silent Prayer

Announcements

[All are invited to remain for fellowship and light refreshments.]