



GOOD FRIDAY

LECTIONARY COMMENTATOR

Friday, April 2, 2010

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Lection - Matt. 27:32-54 (New Revised Standard Version)

(v. 32) As they went out, they came upon a man from Cyrene named Simon; they compelled this man to carry his cross. (v. 33) And when they came to a place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull), (v. 34) they offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall; but when he tasted it, he would not drink it. (v. 35) And when they had crucified him, they divided his clothes among themselves by casting lots; (v. 36) then they sat down there and kept watch over him. (v. 37) Over his head they put the charge against him, which read, “This is Jesus, the King of the Jews.”

(v. 38) Then two bandits were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left. (v. 39) Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads (v. 40) and saying, “You who

would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross.” (v. 41) In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking him, saying, (v. 42) “He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down from the cross now, and we will believe in him. (v. 43) He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he wants to; for he said, ‘I am God’s Son.’” (v. 44) The bandits who were crucified with him also taunted him in the same way.

(v. 45) From noon on, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. (v. 46) And about three o’clock Jesus cried with a loud voice, “Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?” that is, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (v. 47) When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, “This man is calling for Elijah.” (v. 48) At once one of them ran and got a sponge, filled it with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink. (v. 49) But the others said, “Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him.” (v. 50) Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last. (v. 51) At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, and the rocks were split. (v. 52) The tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised. (v. 53) After his resurrection they came out of the tombs and entered the holy city and appeared to many. (v. 54) Now when the centurion and those with him, who were keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were terrified and said, “Truly this man was God’s Son!”

I. Description of the Liturgical Moment

What could possibly be the significance of recounting the horrors of the crucifixion story in 2010? How are we to relate this story to an age that clearly prefers to celebrate the commercial aspects of the Easter season as opposed to the spiritual benefits of this high and holy time on the church calendar? In a word: What is the importance of the crucifixion story for the lives of men and women, boys and girls living in the twenty-first century in the hood, on main street, on Wall Street, on back streets and in the streets?

When we recount the horrors of the crucifixion, we are reminded once again of just how much Jesus Christ did for us on Calvary. It is the time when we remember once again why Jesus came, why he died, and why God raised him from the dead. It is in Jesus that God demonstrates his steadfast love to redeem us and to make us whole again.

II. Biblical Interpretation for Preaching and Worship: Matthew 27:32-54

Part One: The Contemporary Contexts of the Interpreter

It is indeed difficult in this Easter season of extravagance and commercialism to fix our minds on God’s effort to bring us back into a right relationship with God through Jesus Christ. And yet, that is the essence of the crucifixion passage that is before us. Life begins to make sense when we remember the ends to which God was willing to go in order to set our lives once again on the right track. Calvary and its horrors place before us the brokenness of our existence and what God intended to do about it.

The retelling of the crucifixion story invites us to turn inward in an effort to help us to understand what is going on underneath our skin where, as Dr. A. Louis Patterson so ably reminds us, “life is truly lived.” Henry David Thoreau captures some of our inward dilemma when he says, “the mass of [men and women] lead lives of quiet desperation.” These sayings tag for us what we know to be the truth: that even in the midst of the celebratory tone of the season, so often in the inner chambers of our hearts there is turmoil, unrest, fear, and angst. And this tension and anxiety are caused by so much that is not good and not right in our lives. An understanding of what Jesus accomplished on Calvary helps us to understand our lives and our dilemmas. Calvary helps us to understand our brokenness.

In spite of the festiveness and celebratory nature that shopkeepers establish, many of us know in our heart of hearts that we are broken. Our homes are broken, hearts are broken, relationships are broken, lives are broken, promises are broken, friendships are broken, and bonds of trust (sometimes right here in the church) are broken. We are broken. Calvary is God’s effort to deal with the brokenness of his fallen and rebellious creation.

Part Two: Biblical Commentary

That is the message for today. That is the good news for today. That is the reason for today. Thank God for Jesus. Jesus came because there was something wrong and broken at the very center of our existence and we had not the means or the resources to fix it. In Jesus, God was determined to reconnect, to fix, to make whole again that which was broken in our world.

In our day, there has been such a cheapening of the Gospel, such a shallow pronouncing of the unsearchable riches of God’s grace, that if one were to give full ear to the popular preaching of our day you could come away thinking that Christ Jesus came into our world just so that we could get a job, a car, and a new house. But God did not send Jesus into the world for our material success, worldly gain, or creature comforts. Jesus came because there was something seriously wrong at the center of our existence and we did not have within us the means to fix it. Thus, God sent Jesus into the world to bring us back into a right relationship with our Creator. Life is lived to its fullest purpose when we are in a right relationship with God, and it is Jesus who makes that relationship possible.

Once that right relationship has been established, then a proper perspective on the whole of life comes into view. But we must first get right with God. I suppose on a day like today that some could ask in sincerity: Were we really that bad off? In a word: yes! In a word: absolutely! In a few words: no doubt about it! That humankind is in serious trouble from which they need deliverance is a fact assumed everywhere in the Bible. This is made explicit at the outset of Genesis and it is either explicit or implicit on every page of the New Testament. It is impossible to grasp the significance of the crucifixion separate and apart from the biblical understanding of sin.

Call it what you will or may, but sin is a factor in the human predicament. It is a worsening scenario from which we need deliverance. What plagues us, what troubles us, and sometimes even tortures us is not some slight imbalance on the periphery of our being, but it is something wrong and broken at the very center of who we are.

And that is what is so frightening. Where we are really troubled, where we are broken, where we are wrong is so central to the core of who we are. Our refusal to own up to it causes us not to know how sick we are without Jesus; how desperate our plight is without Jesus; how damnable our position is without Jesus.

The horrors of Calvary remind us of human brokenness. Our very nature is depraved. We were born on a slippery slope and a downward slide. We come here longing for the right, but leaning to the left. And with the progression of time, our condition does not get better; it gets worse. For the more I learn about myself, the less I come to expect from myself. The more I see in myself, the more I shake my head about myself. My efforts to rid myself of what plagues me, is the equivalent of peeling an onion; the more onion I peel away the more onion I find.

What God accomplished on Calvary makes us whole again. Thank God for Jesus, for even though we were broken and knew we were broken, we didn't have the ability on our own to get back to God. Yet God was not satisfied to leave us in our fallen condition. A way had to be made! A fountain had to be opened! A river had to be crossed! We needed somebody who could meet us where we were and lift us to where we ought to be. So, on Good Friday, here comes Jesus in power and in paradox. Here comes Jesus the judge who was judged in our place. Here comes Jesus looking like a man but talking and acting like God.

Look again upon the Crucified One as a reminder to ourselves of what Jesus did for us. For us, he took residency in time and was born of suspect parentage, in a third rate country, in a forgotten corner of the world. For us, he gave up his rightful seat in that celestial city that was older than Eden and taller than Rome. For us, he traded in the praises of angels for the sin-stricken curses of lost humanity. For us, he gave up a crown for a cross and a throne for a tomb. For us, he took on Mary's nature but not Mary's faults. For us, he who knew no sin took on all of our sins and died the death of a common criminal on a blood-stained hill just outside of Jerusalem. So, look again on Calvary and see what God did for us in Jesus Christ.

The right look at Calvary:

- Will send fathers home to their children;
- The right look at Calvary will make husbands love their wives;
- The right look at Calvary will heal wounded hearts;
- The right look at Calvary will make families whole again;
- The right look at Calvary will help us reclaim the real reason for the season.

Thank God for Jesus and what he did for us on Calvary; just look and you can see!

Celebration

Brokenness came into our lives through the first Adam, but wholeness comes into our lives through Jesus Christ, the second Adam:

The first Adam:	The second Adam:
Brought us death	Brought us life
Separated us from God	Reconciled us to God
Broke us	Put us together again
Pulled us down	Lifted us up again
Took away our peace	Gave us peace that surpasses all understanding
Ruined us	Restored us
Put us out	Took us in
Made us orphans	Made us sons and daughters of God
Wounded us	Healed us.

That's why we call today Good Friday!

Descriptive Details

The descriptive details in this passage include:

Sights: A Black man carrying the cross of Christ, Gologtha, people gambling for Christ's clothes after he dies; a sign hanging over the head of Christ, two thieves hanging alongside Christ, an earthquake, rocks splitting, Jesus being offered sour wine on a stick, tombs opening and dead saints being raised, the terrified look on the face of the Centurion and those watching over Christ because of all they saw;

Sounds: People mocking Christ as he dies on the cross, a thief on the cross taunting Christ, Christ moaning and asking God why God had forsaken him, Jesus letting out his last breath, the temple of the curtain being torn from top to bottom, the earth shaking, rocks splitting, the declaration of the Centurion;

Taste: The sour taste of wine mixed with vinegar on a gauze; and

Colors: The red blood of Christ, the pale color of the wood used for the cross, the color of the clothes worn by those on the cross, the bright color of the temple curtain, the flesh-tone color of the faces of the people who rose from graves, and the various colors of the clothing worn by those who rose from their graves.