

Sunday April 5, 2020
Lesson 6: Jesus Dies on a Cross
Scripture: Mark 15: 22-39

Context:

Our section moves from the wilderness to salvation and how we understand Jesus' role as the Savior of our lives. We will explore what salvation means and how that plays out in our understanding of Jesus and daily life. The first scripture passage for this section is Mark, chapter fifteen, verses twenty-two through thirty-nine.

This chapter in Mark chronicles the death of Jesus. Chapter fifteen has four affirmations of the Apostles' Creed: he suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, was dead, and buried.¹ The text also contains allusions to the Old Testament. While on the cross, Jesus' Cry of Dereliction (verse thirty-four) is a direct quotation in Aramaic of the psalmist's opening complaint in Psalm twenty-two.² Furthermore, several details of narrative contain parts of the psalm: dividing Jesus' garments and casting lots, wagging heads and mocking, and the righteous suffering servant motif.³ These allusions are to help fulfill Old Testament prophecies surrounding the death of the Son of man.

The text also contains many Marcan themes. There is hostility from the religious authorities and his disciples misunderstand his purpose and are in stages of betrayal, denial, and flight.⁴ The crucifixion makes a parody of his role as king. He is tried and mocked as King of Jews, his throne is a cross, his courtiers two robbers, and his public are the enemies who kill him.⁵ Even in his final moments of pain and agony, people mock him and make a joke of his death. They ask if he too will swirl up to the heavens like Elijah who avoided death and rode away on a chariot. The only person to recognize him as the Son of God is a Gentile soldier.

Mark's account of the condemnation and crucifixion is one of the shorter Gospel accounts. Yet, there is a lot of depth to the details given. Jesus' words are about suffering and pain. There is darkness and shadows. The voices of those who mock him are present and the description of pain is vivid. The crucifixion of Jesus is anything but pretty. It is horrific and painful. Yet this is how Jesus gave himself for those he loved.

Application:

The crucifixion of Jesus is one painters, poets, writers, and composers have used to draw attention to the suffering and passion of our Lord. Whenever we witness works of

¹ Williamson, Lamar Jr. "Mark," *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (John Knox Press: Louisville, KY, 2009), 275.

² *Ibid.*, 275.

³ *Ibid.*, 275-276.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 277.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 277.

art to commemorate this event, we usually either experience chills to the bone or have tears flowing ceaselessly out of our eyes.

There is nothing quaint or beautiful about Jesus' final moments on earth. After facing an unfair trial, he is beaten to a bloody pulp. He was stripped of his dignity and left to die alone only to hear the mockery of those around him. What most art depictions cannot show is that he was probably actually completely naked; no loincloth to cover his genitalia. He died without his disciples near him, the last memory being of them fleeing after his arrest.

Yet Jesus died on the cross giving his life for all including those disciples who left him in his deepest time of woe. He took the crown of thorns and the derision thrown at him. He did not fight back or call upon the angels to disarm his persecutors.

The word salvation means to be made whole or deliverance from harm or loss. As we contemplate Jesus' death on the cross, we might think about what he made whole or who was delivered in what happened to him. Salvation is meant to have a long lasting impact on whoever receives it.

In the United Methodist Church we believe Jesus' death upon the cross was part of justifying grace, the moment when the world was reconciled to God through Jesus giving his life for humanity. This is a gift, something we cannot earn or add to. Jesus' atoning for our sins of the world upon the cross gave a gift to humanity, which continues to transform us.

As we think about Jesus' atonement on the cross, we are also given an example. In his last moments of earth, Jesus showed us what being delivered from evil looked like. When he received the mockery of those who derided him, he did not shout back at them or threaten them. He did not use his power to save himself from the fate of death. He showed us that human pain and suffering is real in his Cry of Dereliction. He showed us what obedience looks like in the face of terror and horror.

None of us can repay Jesus for what he did on the cross. It does not matter how many good deeds we perform, how much we give to the church, or how many cuss words we block from coming out of our mouths. We can grow in grace and mercy, but none of us can fully atone for all that we've done to earn God's grace or love.

Yet that is the power of the cross. Even as sinners deeply mired in sin who struggle day in and day out, Jesus' death on the cross over two thousand years ago gave us proof of God's eternal love for us. Jesus died a painful death so that we might live and have faith in him.

As we gather together (hopefully digitally) on this Palm Sunday, we are reminded of Jesus' ultimate gift from the cross. This week we will be invited to reflect on the Passion of our Lord and how the story still plays out today. Jesus poured himself out and chose to give his life for all

In the process he also modeled those tenets of the Christian faith for us to live. If we follow him to the cross, we will find ourselves learning to forgive when it is hard to do so. We will learn that sometimes we are complicit in the sin of the world whether it is actively hurting others or perhaps standing around and doing nothing in the face of evil. And we will be given the choice of how we will repent and seek the right paths when we do mess up. Through it all, the cross will stand to remind us that no matter how we may stumble, there is one person who will continue to love us in spite of ourselves.

What does salvation mean to you? How do you understand justifying grace? Why

is important to reflect upon the cross? What does it mean to say Jesus is my Savior and connect it to the cross? How does the cross convict you of your sin? Take a few moments to look at a cross this week and reflect upon the pain and suffering of Jesus.

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