

Palm/Passion Sunday  
Luke 22:14-23:56  
April 10, 2022

Grace and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

“And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.” – The Lord’s Prayer, Fifth Petition

We all know where that’s from. Of course, the Lord’s Prayer we will pray shortly. The Lord’s Prayer many of you might pray prior to going to bed or upon awakening. Christians utilize this prayer in worship together as the body of Christ and individually in our walk of faith.

These words about forgiveness are just one petition of that prayer. In his *Small Catechism*, Martin Luther penned his explanation of this petition.

We ask in this prayer that our heavenly Father would not regard our sins nor deny these petitions on their account, for we are worthy of nothing for which we ask, nor have we earned it. Instead we ask that God would give us all things by grace, for we sin daily and indeed deserve only punishment. So, on the other hand, we, too, truly want to forgive heartily and to do good gladly to those who sin against us. (*Luther’s Small Catechism 500 Years of Reformation Pocket Edition*; 2016 Augsburg Fortress, p.24).

Asking, praying, forgiveness. They are themes that run throughout the two chapters often referred to as the “Passion Narrative” we just read. We know prayer was vital to Jesus’ earthly life. Luke emphasizes this more so than any of the other gospel authors. Through prayer, God his Father, drew near. In some of Jesus’ most daunting circumstances, amidst exhaustion, temptation, and in our reading with his death lurking imminently on the horizon, he turns to prayer. He prays for Peter (aka Simon) that his faith may not fail. He prays at the Mount of Olives that his cup (i.e., death) might be removed from him by his Father. Yet, the very next words of his prayer are, “yet, not my will but yours be done.” The very next sentence, “Then an angel from heaven appeared to him and gave him strength.” In his praying. In his asking. God is at work. God grants Jesus strength for what awaits.

One would think Jesus’ time of prayer might be done upon being strengthened, yet we learn “In his anguish, he prayed more earnestly.” Upon arising from his time of prayer he goes to the disciples in which he finds them asleep because of their own grief and Jesus commands them, “Get up and pray that you may not come into the time of trial.”

Right to the very end of his life, Jesus sets for all to see then and there, yesterday, today, and tomorrow a way of life as a beloved child of God. In his final hours, he does not waiver. Staying connected to his Father keeps his eyes set on God’s will. It gives him strength. In that moment and others, prayer brings Jesus the healing he needs, and his desire is that those that follow discover that same healing and strength for whatever life throws our way.

Then we come to what might be described as another prayer. This time, not from one of his disciples, those closest to him who have observed him in prayer, asked him how to pray, heard his imperative directed their way to pray. No, this prayer comes from a criminal hanging alongside Jesus. Shortly after Jesus utters perhaps some of his most healing, grace-filled words, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing" one of the two criminals that also were led away to be put to death with Jesus asks, prays, "Jesus' remember me when you come into your kingdom."

As those standing nearby hurl insults and mock Jesus, as the other criminal puts Jesus to the test to save himself and the two hung alongside him, I wonder if those grace-filled words of forgiveness, his continued model of life with God, aren't the catalyst that spark the prayer, the request, of this second criminal, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

Does grace change him? Does forgiveness light the spark to set his sights upon Jesus? Amidst everything this scene presents us with God's will finds a way. Grace is revealed. Forgiveness is granted. Salvation is won. A heart is changed. Eyes are opened. God is made known.

That's the way it is with God. Amidst all the evils of the world found in these two chapters. Betrayal and denial. Injustice. Greed. The condemnation, sentencing and death of an innocent man. The blindness to see who Jesus is. Those closest to him fall asleep in Jesus' greatest time of need. Amidst it all, God's will finds a way. Grace is made visible. Salvation overcomes evil.

Everything has changed. Even a centurion, a Roman guard, is changed. His eyes opened to see and confess, "Certainly this man was innocent" as he praised God.

This story is moving. It is painful. Heartbreaking. Each time I read it or heard it read, something deep within is stirred. It's an emotional roller coaster even when I know the ending that is to come. Perhaps, it's because at times I find myself taking God's forgiveness for granted. My own hardness of heart at times surfaces. We know this story so well. Yet, maybe I need to read it more often because each time I do my eyes are opened yet again to just how far Jesus will go. To just how much he loves. To just how much it is God's will is to forgive and save. To return all to Godself. This story yet again opens my heart to the amazing and abundance of God's forgiveness. It is only Luke, sometimes thought to be a physician, that gives us these words of forgiveness uttered by Jesus in his final moments. Why not the others? Maybe, it's because these words changed Luke. Maybe, it's because he knew the healing found in them.

We need this story. The world needs this story. Because the world hasn't changed all that much. Evil continues to loom. Hearts are hardened. Wars rage. Fingers are pointed. We sin daily. We need grace. Forgiveness. Healing. We need to hear, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." We need to hear, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise." We need the grace of God and we have it. We are assured of it.

This week, I invite you to enter more fully into the story. To experience the grace in the meal we will share on Maundy Thursday. To see the Lord who serves until the very end as he washes his disciples feet. To hear this passion on Good Friday as written in John's gospel. To dwell in the stillness of the

night. To center ourselves in prayer and find strength. And then, to join us Easter Sunday to hear the end. No, to hear the beginning of the dawn of living as a resurrection people. To smell the fragrance of new life. To celebrate the salvation of God. The raise our voices in praise, joy and let our “Alleluias” sound for the world to hear. To proclaim what God has done.