

GOOD FRIDAY

Christ Our Savior Lutheran Church

Taunts that Turned Out to be Testimonies

Matthew 27:41-43

⁴¹ In the same way the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders mocked him. ⁴² “He saved others,” they said, “but he can’t save himself! He’s the king of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him.

⁴³ He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, ‘I am the Son of God.’”

We heard Jesus called all sorts of nasty things in the Holy Gospel readings on the Sundays in Lent this year: “of Beelzbul,” “a Samaritan,” and “demon-possessed.” We also heard how our Lord effectively responded for us and for our salvation. On Good Friday his enemies thought they finally had Jesus where they wanted him, dying while nailed to Roman cross, so now they mock him. But Jesus doesn’t respond because their taunts turned out to be testimonies.

Their first taunt was, “He saved others, but he can’t save himself!” (Mt 27:42). “He saved others” is a certainty. He could not “save himself” is also certain, but not on account of some defect in Jesus’ power as his enemies thought. In dying Jesus was making atonement for the sin of the world. He could not bear away our sins, unless the burden of those sins was laid on his own back ... unless he carried our griefs, our sorrows, our diseases, and our transgressions. “He saved others, but he can’t save himself.” The taunt turns into a testimony when we realize the impossibility of saving himself was purely the result of his own willing and self-sacrificing love.

The second taunt was, “Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him” (Mt 27:42). The unbelieving religious leaders thought coming down from the cross was the way to gain glory and honor. But precisely because Jesus did not come down, hearts turn to him this day from the ends of the earth and put their trust in him and their love at his feet. It is his glory to demonstrate divine power and love on the cross, not off it. The reed scepter that was put in his hand, the crown of thorns, and the inscription on the cross were all intended to be sneering signs of disgrace, but in fact turned out to be signs of his glorious kind of rule. Now and into eternity people will bow before him who died for them, with the kind of allegiance and sense of service no other monarch or superior may even dream of attaining.

The final taunt was, “He trusts God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him” (Mt 27:43). Christ crucified on the cross was the highest indication that he was God’s beloved Son in whom the Father was well pleased. This was the hour when God was proudest of him, when he was perfectly obedient unto death while entrusting himself to his Father’s will and care. The taunt certainly turns into testimony when from the empty grave and at the Son’s ruling at the Father’s right hand all humanity knows that the one who endured the cross is God’s beloved Son, with whom he is well-pleased.

The taunting, in various forms, continues to this day. By nature, no descendant of Adam grasps the wisdom of God in the folly of the cross. But by God’s grace and with the Holy Spirit’s accompanying testimony you do. And so we will continue to testify to the Good of this Friday when Jesus was nailed to a cross, and celebrate it.

Amen.