

# LENTEN VESPERS

## Christ Our Savior Lutheran Church

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### Passion History: The Cry of a Righteous Sufferer

#### Mark 15:21-46

<sup>21</sup> A certain man from Cyrene, Simon, the father of Alexander and Rufus, was passing by on his way in from the country, and they forced him to carry the cross. <sup>22</sup> They brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means “the place of the skull”). <sup>23</sup> Then they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it. <sup>24</sup> And they crucified him. Dividing up his clothes, they cast lots to see what each would get.

<sup>25</sup> It was nine in the morning when they crucified him. <sup>26</sup> The written notice of the charge against him read: THE KING OF THE JEWS.

<sup>27</sup> They crucified two rebels with him, one on his right and one on his left. <sup>[28]</sup> <sup>29</sup> Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying, “So! You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, <sup>30</sup> come down from the cross and save yourself!” <sup>31</sup> In the same way the chief priests and the teachers of the law mocked him among themselves. “He saved others,” they said, “but he can’t save himself! <sup>32</sup> Let this Messiah, this king of Israel, come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe.” Those crucified with him also heaped insults on him.

<sup>33</sup> At noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. <sup>34</sup> And at three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “*Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?*” (which means “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”).

<sup>35</sup> When some of those standing near heard this, they said, “Listen, he’s calling Elijah.”

<sup>36</sup> Someone ran, filled a sponge with wine vinegar, put it on a staff, and offered it to Jesus to drink. “Now leave him alone. Let’s see if Elijah comes to take him down,” he said.

<sup>37</sup> With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last.

<sup>38</sup> The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. <sup>39</sup> And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, saw how he died, he said, “Surely this man was the Son of God!”

<sup>40</sup> Some women were watching from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joseph, and Salome. <sup>41</sup> In Galilee these women had followed him and cared for his needs. Many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem were also there.

<sup>42</sup> It was Preparation Day (that is, the day before the Sabbath). So as evening approached, <sup>43</sup> Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent member of the Council, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for Jesus’ body. <sup>44</sup> Pilate was surprised to hear that he was already dead. Summoning the centurion, he asked him if Jesus had already died. <sup>45</sup> When he learned from the centurion that it was so, he gave the body to Joseph. <sup>46</sup> So Joseph bought some linen cloth, took down the body, wrapped it in the linen, and placed it in a tomb cut out of rock. Then he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb.

On these Wednesdays of Lent we’ve been reading the Passion History according to Mark and preaching sermons on the texts from Jesus’ perspective. Hopefully we’ve gained deeper insight into the fact that he suffered for us and for our salvation. Tonight’s final reading covered the crucifixion, death and burial of Jesus. The Tenebrae service on Good Friday will cover this in great and moving detail as darkness descends until the final candle is snuffed out. But Mark’s account before us tonight is relatively sparse in details. Especially details revealing what Jesus was thinking while he suffered and died. There are only two.

First, Mark tell us that at Golgotha, before crucifying him, the soldiers “offered him wine mixed with myrrh,” a narcotic to dull the excruciating pain, “but he did not take it” (15:23). From this it is reasonable to assume that Jesus was determined to face his suffering for you and me with his senses unclouded. He needed to be praying and speaking and thinking clearly as he suffered and died.

The other detail is given after Jesus had been on the cross already for six hours. “At three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, ‘Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?’ (which means, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’)” (15:34). From this his enemies surrounding his cross in the darkness made a pun out of the Aramaic word “Eloi,” saying, “He’s calling Elijah” (15:35). Judaism had and still has a tradition that Elijah will come back before

the appearance of the Messiah and help establish a Messianic kingdom. They knew Jesus did the things and said the things prophesied about the Messiah but in their sin-darkened minds getting nailed to a Roman cross was so pitifully un-messianic they jeered how Elijah would never help someone like him.

We don't have to imagine what was going on in the mind of Jesus on the cross that led him to cry out and what he thought when people mocked him. It was the Old Testament Psalm 22. Just listen to some of its incredible verses.

*For the director of music. To the tune of "The Doe of the Morning." A psalm of David.*

<sup>1</sup> My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Why are you so far from saving me,  
so far from my cries of anguish?

<sup>2</sup> My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer,  
by night, but I find no rest.

<sup>3</sup> Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One;  
you are the one Israel praises.

<sup>4</sup> In you our ancestors put their trust;  
they trusted and you delivered them.

<sup>6</sup> But I am a worm and not a man,  
scorned by everyone, despised by the people.

<sup>7</sup> All who see me mock me;  
they hurl insults, shaking their heads.

<sup>8</sup> "He trusts in the LORD," they say,  
"let the LORD rescue him.

Let him deliver him,  
since he delights in him."

<sup>11</sup> Do not be far from me,  
for trouble is near  
and there is no one to help.

<sup>12</sup> Many bulls surround me;  
strong bulls of Bashan encircle me.

<sup>13</sup> Roaring lions that tear their prey  
open their mouths wide against me.

<sup>14</sup> I am poured out like water,  
and all my bones are out of joint.

My heart has turned to wax;  
it has melted within me.

<sup>15</sup> My mouth is dried up like a potsherd,  
and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth;  
you lay me in the dust of death.

<sup>16</sup> Dogs surround me,  
a pack of villains encircles me;  
they pierce my hands and my feet.

<sup>17</sup> All my bones are on display;  
people stare and gloat over me.

<sup>18</sup> They divide my clothes among them  
and cast lots for my garment.

<sup>19</sup> But you, LORD, do not be far from me.  
You are my strength; come quickly to help me.

There's a lot to consider in those words, but I want you to notice tonight how they constitute the cry of a righteous sufferer. Hanging on the cross in dreadful darkness on Good Friday afternoon Jesus had been made sin for us (2 Co 5:21) and was cursed for us (Ga 3:13). The Father turned away from his Son in just and dreadful judgment upon sins he was suffering for, even though none of them were his own. And so, he cries out in anguish as well as in hope, never turning his back on God.

A young pastor I know is really suffering right now. Someone has really gone after him, ascribing all sorts of sinister motives to what he says and does, inferring that he has egregiously violated sound doctrine and practice, etc, etc. At most the young pastor is guilty of being young and inexperienced. Of making a mistake once in a while in how he said something or didn't say something. For which he readily apologizes and seeks to improve the next time ... and does. Yet he's being vilified by his critic, who like to lace his attacks with allusions to the Bible and Lutheran traditions.

Every pastor has been in this young brother's shoes. As I'm sure has everyone who works in a people profession, especially when we're young and inexperienced. And it really stings. And you really do suffer when unfairly attacked. Some will leave their vocations because of it. Others become bitter. Still others blame God for putting them where he did. But unlike Jesus every pastor, every teacher, every public servant so attacked knows deep down that they're guilty at some level. Maybe guilty of being inexperienced. Maybe guilty of not more fully taking someone else's perceptions into account before opening your mouth. Maybe guilty of not following up and following through. Serving people very quickly makes clear to you how far from perfect you are. So even our righteous cries when suffering are tempered with deserved guilt.

That's what makes Jesus' cry on the cross so amazing. He really wasn't guilty of anything, in any way, on any level. And yet he was determined to suffer anyway and to do so with Psalm 22 on his mind. "My God, my God why have you forsaken me" wasn't a complaint about how unfairly he was being treated, it was an acknowledgement of the terrors and horrors of human sin and God's just judgment on it. It was almost more than even Jesus could bear, and certainly more than you and I will ever bear no matter how unfairly we might be accused. Yet, Jesus bore it all without bitterness, without quitting, without giving up on God. Instead, even in his unimaginable anguish, he still

called his heavenly Father, “my God.” Such is the cry of the only truly righteous sufferer who suffered for us and our salvation.

The conclusion of the Psalm Jesus had on his mind when he suffered and died contains these verses:

<sup>22</sup> I will declare your name to my people;  
in the assembly I will praise you.

<sup>30</sup> Posterity will serve him;  
future generations will be told about the Lord.

<sup>31</sup> They will proclaim his righteousness,  
declaring to a people yet unborn:  
He has done it!

Amen.

## Prayers of the Church

### *Special Prayers and intercessions:*

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### *Concluding*

We praise and thank you, O God, through your Son Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom you have enlightened us by revealing the light of your love that never fades. Night is falling and the day's allotted span draws to a close. As you have conducted us through the day and brought us to night's beginning, keep us now in Christ; grant us a peaceful evening and a refreshing night's rest; and, at the end, bring us to everlasting life through Christ our Lord. Through whom we offer glory, honor, and worship to you in the Holy Spirit, now and always and forever. Amen.

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