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Zion Lutheran Church, Youngstown, Ohio

**Weekend of Sunday, March 11, 2018**  
**4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent/Lectionary X/Proper X/Year B**

**Primary Text: Mark 15:22-32**

**Luke 23:39-43**

**John 19:25b-27**

**Sermon Title: “Crucified, Conversation, and Concern”**

## **Theme**

## **Text**

### **Jesus is crucified (Mark 15:22-32a)**

<sup>22</sup>Then they brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means the place of a skull). <sup>23</sup>And they offered him wine mixed with myrrh; but he did not take it. <sup>24</sup>And they crucified him, and divided his clothes among them, casting lots to decide what each should take.

<sup>25</sup>It was nine o'clock in the morning when they crucified him. <sup>26</sup>The inscription of the charge against him read, "The King of the Jews." <sup>27</sup>And with him they crucified two bandits, one on his right and one on his left.

<sup>29</sup>Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads and saying, "Aha! You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, <sup>30</sup>save yourself, and come down from the cross!" <sup>31</sup>In the same way the chief priests, along with the scribes, were also mocking him among themselves and saying, "He saved others; he cannot save himself. <sup>32</sup>Let the Messiah, the King of Israel, come down from the cross now, so that we may see and believe."

### **Jesus Promised his kingdom to the repentant thief (Luke 23:39-43)**

<sup>39</sup>One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, "Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!" <sup>40</sup>But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? <sup>41</sup>And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong." <sup>42</sup>Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." <sup>43</sup>He replied, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

### **Jesus entrusts Mary and John to each other (John 19:25-27)**

<sup>25</sup>And that is what the soldiers did.

Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. <sup>26</sup>When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, "Woman, here is your son." <sup>27</sup>Then he said to the disciple, "Here is your mother." And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

## Sermon

This Lent, as you know by now, we are journeying with Jesus along the Scriptural Stations of the Cross that begin in the Garden of Gethsemane on the infamous night of his betrayal, and it will end on Good Friday when his broken and lifeless body is hastily laid to rest in a borrowed tomb.

Traditionally, the Stations of the Cross in its several forms, are supposed to be a meditative spiritual exercise, so if you would like to and it would be helpful to you, I invite you to relax and close your eyes and allow the narrative and my commentary to play out in the theater of your mind. However, if you are one of those people who close your eyes and then fall asleep, you might want to focus your attention on the picture on the screen.

Last week we left Jesus on the Via Delarosa. Having been sentenced by a reluctant Pilate, he was crowned with a crown of thorns and given a purple cloak and then the mocking began. *"Hail, King of the Jews!" the soldiers and the others chided.* The blood already flowed down his face and into his eyes from the many puncture wounds from the crown of thorns, and yet, Mark recorded that they struck him on the head with a reed and spat upon him and knelt down before him in mock respect. Then they took the purple cloak off of him and scourged him before putting the cross on his shoulder and leading him out to be crucified.

Along the way, tradition says he stumbled and fell three times, so the Roman detail conscripted Simon of Cyrene to carry his cross the rest of the way. While walking, staggering, and stumbling to Golgotha, Jesus encountered women who were weeping over the sight. I told you last week, this station confuses me. I don't understand what they were crying about – I mean they got what they wanted right? Well, that is where we left off last week – another awkward uncomfortable suspension of the story.

The story isn't over though is it? We know our Lord Jesus gets crucified – nailed to a cross till dead. We don't want to go with him. We wish we could just stop it! Why didn't someone stop it!

But then that would leave a world of sinners lost to their own sin and for God that obviously would not do. And so he went on, and if we are going to make this journey with him, we must go on too.

### **Jesus is crucified (Mark 15:22-32a)**

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The gruesome procession finally arrived at its destination. Golgotha is an Aramaic word which translated means "skull" and in Jesus' day it was located just outside Jerusalem's walls, on a road leading in and out of the city through the Damascus Gate. The Romans put some thought into the placement of their crucifixion site. There beside the road where pilgrims and merchants passed to enter the city was a demonstration of their ultimate authority and control.

The place was not well kept – I mean who would do that? Crucifixion was grizzly work. After a person was crucified the work of the Romans was done. The Romans didn't care about human remains left rotting in the hot middle-eastern sun. And the place was overrun with wild dogs and rodents. Little wonder why.

We may know it equally well by another name. The Roman Catholic Church and its mandate of the use of Latin has named it, Calvary. Scripture does not say so, but tradition would indicate that Golgotha was a hill.

The traditional site was identified in 325 CE by Helena of Constantinople, the mother of Constantine. Today on that site is built the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, another gaudy shrine built to preserve a sacred spot, actually two separate sacred spots, but we will come back to that next week.

Is it the actual site of the crucifixion of Jesus? It's hard to say. What is not hard to say is what happened there.

Mark wrote that after arriving at the place of his crucifixion, the Roman soldiers offered him “wine mixed with myrrh.” Wine mixed with myrrh acted as a narcotic – the only mercy he would be extended. In Proverbs it is written:

<sup>6</sup>Give strong drink to one who is perishing,  
and wine to those in bitter distress;

But Mark also recorded that Jesus did not take it. Jesus’ refusal to drink the wine is an indication that he is and will remain fully conscious throughout his crucifixion. He will not simply “mail in” the salvation of the world. Nor will he fall asleep from its effects at that crucial hour, as his disciples had done in Gethsemane. This little detail, just one little verse, also underlines the fact that Jesus died in full possession of his powers, not as someone semiconscious and drugged.

This causes me to be reminded, he had the power to remove himself from the cross, and yet in great agony and being fully present, he did not.

Having refused the drink that could have dulled the coming pain, they crucified him. Now, if you are like me, I tend to think of crucifixion as the result – death. That would be incorrect. Crucifixion was a process that resulted in death.

One artist rendering I saw had soldiers physically holding Jesus down on the cross as he was wrestled into position. Probably a true depiction for the others being crucified, I doubt Jesus put up a fight.

But the pain? That was real and unavoidable. Crude iron spikes available in that day were put on their mark and then with a heavy mallet driven into the flesh and then struck again, and again to drive the spike deep into the wood to hold the victim secure.

Jesus screamed out in pain. I have no doubt about that – after all, he was truly human, what good would his suffering be if he did not feel it? And then, the other hand. And then, his feet.

Studies have been done on the craft of crucifixion. People want to know, were the nails drive through the hand – the question being, is there enough flesh between the bones of the hand to keep from ripping out under the body’s weight?

Or were the nails drive into the wrist, where there was more flesh and bone to hold its victim?

No matter, having been nailed to the cross, the cross was lifted up. A spectacle for all to see.

Mark wrote that the soldiers “divided his clothes among them, casting lots to decide what each should take.” The reality was Roman soldiers, especially ones assigned to this particularly gruesome detail were not well-paid. And cloth and clothing in general was handmade and expensive, so if there were some spoils, why not take them? Their victims weren’t going to be needing them.

And one other detail you may not be aware of: this left the victim completely naked. Completely naked. Did you know that modesty has always been a hallmark of middle-eastern culture? The pictures you’ve seen, like the one before you now, are painted for decency’s sake – but don’t kid yourself. Jesus was naked. And as the pain and shock and blood loss set in he would get the chills before he died.

It was 9:00 AM and the work of the soldiers was done except to make sure the mob behaved themselves. As if there was more humiliation that could be given him, they put a sign above him that said, “The King of the Jews.” In his gospel, John wrote that the sign was actually written in the three languages spoken and written in Judea, Hebrew, Latin, and Greek. Little did they know that they were helping to declare the universality of Jesus’ kingship.

For the next six hours Jesus hung nailed to the cross as a humiliated public spectacle. Having gotten their way, you would have thought the mob would have dispersed. No, they stayed and hurled insults at him till he died.

“He saved others. Let his save himself!”

<sup>32</sup>Let the Messiah, the King of Israel, come down from the cross now, so that we may see and believe."

For the next six hours Jesus hung nailed to the cross as a humiliated public spectacle. Only he knew that his cross was the salvation of humankind.

In the first reading from Numbers, we have the story of the many Israelites who revolted against Moses and so God sent snakes among them and they bit the malcontents and were dying. Then they repented and cried out to be saved and so God told Moses to craft a bronze serpent and put it on a staff in the shape of a cross and those who were bitten by the snakes could look at it and be saved.

Sometimes people ask me why we have to go through Lent and Palm Sunday and Good Friday. It is so we don't forget the price Jesus willingly paid for our salvation. To gaze upon the cross of Christ is to see the power of God and our salvation.

### **Jesus Promised his kingdom to the repentant thief (Luke 23:39-43)**

<sup>39</sup>One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, "Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!" <sup>40</sup>But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? <sup>41</sup>And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong." <sup>42</sup>Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." <sup>43</sup>He replied, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

Of course we all know that Jesus was just one of three crucified that day. The two other unnamed victims have become known as the *repentant thief* and the *unrepentant thief*, and that is because one, the unrepentant thief took that opportunity to chide and challenge Jesus – “If you are who you say you are, then pull yourself down and us with you!” Perhaps he thought a little reverse psychology would work to his benefit.

But the repentant thief seems to have gotten it. “We are getting what we deserve, but this man is innocent.” Then turning to Jesus he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”

Really? Kingdom? Not looking so good at this moment.

But Jesus turned to him and said, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.” Think about it, are there any *other* words you want to hear from Jesus?

### **Jesus entrusts Mary and John to each other (John 19:25-27)**

<sup>25b</sup>Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. <sup>26</sup>When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside

her, he said to his mother, "Woman, here is your son." <sup>27</sup>Then he said to the disciple, "Here is your mother."  
And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

Just to be clear, when we use the term *disciples* we think of the twelve, but there were many more who did not make that circle of twelve, including many women. In a culture where women were little more than a possession, a position that Jesus took issue with, the women and the valuable roles they fulfilled were often simply left out.

But now, at the foot of the cross, almost all the men, who one would think, had the best, most intimate knowledge of Jesus, and who one would then think would be the most devoted to him, were absent.

They scattered in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Peter showed up in the courtyard of the palace until it got too unpleasant.

And now, in his greatest moment of need, only one can be found, "the disciple whom he loved" that most everyone acknowledges was probably John the author. He, at least, knelt by Mary the mother of Jesus, and Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of Clopas.

I wonder, did Mary know, as the song asks? Did she remember the prophecies of the strangers identified as Simeon and Anna at his presentation in the Temple? Did she know and understand just who her son was? Did she know that this was all God's plan and that God had something unbelievable in mind?

But then again, none of this probably mattered at this point. Imagine, all she knows is that her son, her first born son, who had never done anything wrong, and only did what was right in God's sight, was being crucified as a common criminal.

Imagine what might have been going on in Jesus' mind.

Little to wonder about, because John told us. Though Jesus was God's Son, Mary was the human vessel that bore him and nursed him, and diapered him, and raised him, and kissed his boo boos. Jesus looked down from his cross and had compassion for her and so he gave her to the care of his one disciple who was still willing to risk it all.

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Tradition says that John was a young man, and perhaps still needing a mother figure in his life, Jesus gave John to Mary to take as a son. John added, “from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.” Out of tragedy, comes a new family. A representation perhaps of the new family of God, the first believers who become “children of God.”