

SAVE YOURSELF AND US

Luke 22:1-23:56

Palm Sunday/Sunday of the Passion (Series C)

April 10, 2022

Trinity Free Lutheran Church, Grand Forks, ND

Ny Stavanger Free Lutheran Church, Buxton, ND

The gospel lesson for the Sunday of the Passion comes from *The Gospel According to Luke*. It is the full text of chapters 22 and 23. Since it is such a long reading, you may remain seated. From Luke 22, beginning at verse 1, we read in Jesus' name.

¹ Now the Feast of Unleavened Bread drew near, which is called the Passover. ² And the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to put him to death, for they feared the people.

³ Then Satan entered into Judas called Iscariot, who was of the number of the twelve. ⁴ He went away and conferred with the chief priests and officers how he might betray him to them. ⁵ And they were glad, and agreed to give him money. ⁶ So he consented and sought an opportunity to betray him to them in the absence of a crowd.

⁷ Then came the day of Unleavened Bread, on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. ⁸ So Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, "Go and prepare the Passover for us, that we may eat it." ⁹ They said to him, "Where will you have us prepare it?" ¹⁰ He said to them, "Behold, when you have entered the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him into the house that he enters ¹¹ and tell the master of the house, 'The Teacher says to you, Where is the guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?' ¹² And he will show you a large upper room furnished; prepare it there." ¹³ And they went and found it just as he had told them, and they prepared the Passover.

¹⁴ And when the hour came, he reclined at table, and the apostles with him. ¹⁵ And he said to them, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. ¹⁶ For I tell you I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." ¹⁷ And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he said, "Take this, and divide it among yourselves. ¹⁸ For I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." ¹⁹ And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." ²⁰ And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood. ²¹ But behold, the hand of him who betrays me is with me on the table. ²² For the Son of Man goes as it has been determined, but woe to that man by whom he is betrayed!" ²³ And they began to question one another, which of them it could be who was going to do this.

²⁴ A dispute also arose among them, as to which of them was to be regarded as the greatest. ²⁵ And he said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those in authority over them are called benefactors. ²⁶ But not so with you. Rather, let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves. ²⁷ For who is the greater, one who reclines at table or one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at table? But I am among you as the one who serves.

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²⁸ “You are those who have stayed with me in my trials, ²⁹ and I assign to you, as my Father assigned to me, a kingdom, ³⁰ that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

³¹ “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, ³² but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.” ³³ Peter said to him, “Lord, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death.” ³⁴ Jesus said, “I tell you, Peter, the rooster will not crow this day, until you deny three times that you know me.”

³⁵ And he said to them, “When I sent you out with no moneybag or knapsack or sandals, did you lack anything?” They said, “Nothing.” ³⁶ He said to them, “But now let the one who has a moneybag take it, and likewise a knapsack. And let the one who has no sword sell his cloak and buy one. ³⁷ For I tell you that this Scripture must be fulfilled in me: ‘And he was numbered with the transgressors.’ For what is written about me has its fulfillment.” ³⁸ And they said, “Look, Lord, here are two swords.” And he said to them, “It is enough.”

³⁹ And he came out and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives, and the disciples followed him. ⁴⁰ And when he came to the place, he said to them, “Pray that you may not enter into temptation.” ⁴¹ And he withdrew from them about a stone’s throw, and knelt down and prayed, ⁴² saying, “Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done.” ⁴³ And there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him. ⁴⁴ And being in agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground. ⁴⁵ And when he rose from prayer, he came to the disciples and found them sleeping for sorrow, ⁴⁶ and he said to them, “Why are you sleeping? Rise and pray that you may not enter into temptation.”

⁴⁷ While he was still speaking, there came a crowd, and the man called Judas, one of the twelve, was leading them. He drew near to Jesus to kiss him, ⁴⁸ but Jesus said to him, “Judas, would you betray the Son of Man with a kiss?” ⁴⁹ And when those who were around him saw what would follow, they said, “Lord, shall we strike with the sword?” ⁵⁰ And one of them struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his right ear. ⁵¹ But Jesus said, “No more of this!” And he touched his ear and healed him. ⁵² Then Jesus said to the chief priests and officers of the temple and elders, who had come out against him, “Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs? ⁵³ When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness.”

⁵⁴ Then they seized him and led him away, bringing him into the high priest’s house, and Peter was following at a distance. ⁵⁵ And when they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat down among them. ⁵⁶ Then a servant girl, seeing him as he sat in the light and looking closely at him, said, “This man also was with him.” ⁵⁷ But he denied it, saying, “Woman, I do not know him.” ⁵⁸ And a little later someone else saw him and said, “You also are one of them.” But Peter said, “Man, I am not.” ⁵⁹ And after an interval of about an hour still another insisted, saying, “Certainly this man also was with him, for he too is a Galilean.” ⁶⁰ But Peter said, “Man, I do not know what you are talking about.” And immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed. ⁶¹ And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the saying of

the Lord, how he had said to him, **“Before the rooster crows today, you will deny me three times.”** ⁶² And he went out and wept bitterly.

⁶³ Now the men who were holding Jesus in custody were mocking him as they beat him.

⁶⁴ They also blindfolded him and kept asking him, “Prophecy! Who is it that struck you?”

⁶⁵ And they said many other things against him, blaspheming him.

⁶⁶ When day came, the assembly of the elders of the people gathered together, both chief priests and scribes. And they led him away to their council, and they said, ⁶⁷ “If you are the Christ, tell us.” But he said to them, **“If I tell you, you will not believe, ⁶⁸ and if I ask you, you will not answer. ⁶⁹ But from now on the Son of Man shall be seated at the right hand of the power of God.”** ⁷⁰ So they all said, “Are you the Son of God, then?” And he said to them, **“You say that I am.”** ⁷¹ Then they said, “What further testimony do we need? We have heard it ourselves from his own lips.”

^{23:1} Then the whole company of them arose and brought him before Pilate. ² And they began to accuse him, saying, “We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar, and saying that he himself is Christ, a king.” ³ And Pilate asked him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” And he answered him, **“You have said so.”** ⁴ Then Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowds, “I find no guilt in this man.” ⁵ But they were urgent, saying, “He stirs up the people, teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee even to this place.”

⁶ When Pilate heard this, he asked whether the man was a Galilean. ⁷ And when he learned that he belonged to Herod’s jurisdiction, he sent him over to Herod, who was himself in Jerusalem at that time. ⁸ When Herod saw Jesus, he was very glad, for he had long desired to see him, because he had heard about him, and he was hoping to see some sign done by him. ⁹ So he questioned him at some length, but he made no answer. ¹⁰ The chief priests and the scribes stood by, vehemently accusing him. ¹¹ And Herod with his soldiers treated him with contempt and mocked him. Then, arraying him in splendid clothing, he sent him back to Pilate. ¹² And Herod and Pilate became friends with each other that very day, for before this they had been at enmity with each other.

¹³ Pilate then called together the chief priests and the rulers and the people, ¹⁴ and said to them, “You brought me this man as one who was misleading the people. And after examining him before you, behold, I did not find this man guilty of any of your charges against him. ¹⁵ Neither did Herod, for he sent him back to us. Look, nothing deserving death has been done by him. ¹⁶ I will therefore punish and release him.”

¹⁸ But they all cried out together, “Away with this man, and release to us Barabbas”— ¹⁹ a man who had been thrown into prison for an insurrection started in the city and for murder. ²⁰ Pilate addressed them once more, desiring to release Jesus, ²¹ but they kept shouting, “Crucify, crucify him!” ²² A third time he said to them, “Why? What evil has he done? I have found in him no guilt deserving death. I will therefore punish and release him.” ²³ But they were urgent, demanding with loud cries that he should be crucified. And their voices prevailed. ²⁴ So Pilate decided that their demand should be granted. ²⁵ He released the man who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, for whom they asked, but he delivered Jesus over to their will.

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²⁶ And as they led him away, they seized one Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, and laid on him the cross, to carry it behind Jesus. ²⁷ And there followed him a great multitude of the people and of women who were mourning and lamenting for him. ²⁸ But turning to them Jesus said, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. ²⁹ For behold, the days are coming when they will say, ‘Blessed are the barren and the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!’ ³⁰ Then they will begin to say to the mountains, ‘Fall on us,’ and to the hills, ‘Cover us.’ ³¹ For if they do these things when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?”

³² Two others, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. ³³ And when they came to the place that is called The Skull, there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. ³⁴ And Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” And they cast lots to divide his garments. ³⁵ And the people stood by, watching, but the rulers scoffed at him, saying, “He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One!” ³⁶ The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine ³⁷ and saying, “If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!” ³⁸ There was also an inscription over him, “This is the King of the Jews.”

³⁹ One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, “Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!” ⁴⁰ But the other rebuked him, saying, “Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? ⁴¹ And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.” ⁴² And he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” ⁴³ And he said to him, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

⁴⁴ It was now about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour, ⁴⁵ while the sun’s light failed. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. ⁴⁶ Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!” And having said this he breathed his last. ⁴⁷ Now when the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God, saying, “Certainly this man was innocent!” ⁴⁸ And all the crowds that had assembled for this spectacle, when they saw what had taken place, returned home beating their breasts. ⁴⁹ And all his acquaintances and the women who had followed him from Galilee stood at a distance watching these things.

⁵⁰ Now there was a man named Joseph, from the Jewish town of Arimathea. He was a member of the council, a good and righteous man, ⁵¹ who had not consented to their decision and action; and he was looking for the kingdom of God. ⁵² This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. ⁵³ Then he took it down and wrapped it in a linen shroud and laid him in a tomb cut in stone, where no one had ever yet been laid. ⁵⁴ It was the day of Preparation, and the Sabbath was beginning. ⁵⁵ The women who had come with him from Galilee followed and saw the tomb and how his body was laid. ⁵⁶ Then they returned and prepared spices and ointments.

On the Sabbath they rested according to the commandment.

Father, these are your words. Sanctify us in the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.
Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

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I don't know about you, but I enjoy irony. And the passion of Jesus Christ is filled with it. Those who despise and mock Jesus do so by saying and doing things that are true, but which they either do not believe, or they do not understand how true their words and actions really are.

The charge against Jesus was that he claimed to be a king. And Jesus did claim to be a king. He even claimed to be more than a king. He claimed to be the Son of God and the king of heaven and earth. Most often he made these claims in a somewhat subtle manner, though it was clear enough for learned Jews to understand. Occasionally he outright confessed it (e.g., Mark 14:62; Luke 23:3; John 18:36-37). So when the fullness of time came to crucify Jesus, his persecutors mocked him by treating him like a king, sort of.

Herod and his soldiers dressed Jesus up in splendid clothing (23:11). Someone twisted together a crown of thorns, not realizing that suffering is Jesus' true crown. Soldiers knelt before him, saying "Hail, King of the Jews" (27:29). "The rulers scoffed at him, saying, 'He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One!'" (23:35). The soldiers said, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!" (23:37). And Pilate put an inscription above Jesus that simply read, "This is the King of the Jews" (23:38), not even that he claimed to be the King of the Jews, but that he is the King of the Jews (John 19:19-22). This was all done in mockery. It was ironic.

But what really catches my attention is when someone says something that is completely true, but not in the sense they mean it. For example, in *The Gospel of John*, Caiaphas, the high priest, prophesied that Jesus would die for the sake of the people. He did not mean that Jesus would die to save them from their sins, but that he would die as a scapegoat to appease Rome. Or in *The Gospel of Matthew*, the angry mob at Jesus' trial shouts, "His blood be on us and on our children" (27:25). They meant that they would bear the guilt for Jesus' death, not that his blood would sprinkle them to cleanse them of their sins.

One of the scenes that Luke focuses in on is that of the two criminals crucified with Jesus. They both pray to him, and both prayers are true, but one is prayed in disbelief, while the other is prayed in truth. The first one railed at him. The literal translation of that word is "blasphemed." He blasphemed at Jesus, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!" (23:39). This is the piece of irony that caught my attention this year. It's completely true. Jesus could have answered back to him, "That's exactly what I'm doing." But it was not a sincere prayer. And the sense in which it was true, is not even what the criminal meant. The criminal was praying that Jesus would come down from the cross, and get him down as well. But the criminal did not even believe that to be true. He meant it in the same mocking sense as the soldiers and rulers. But the words were completely true in the sense that by not coming down from the cross, Jesus was saving this criminal from his own sin and death. We could even understand it as true in the sense that Jesus was saving himself, not that Jesus needed any saving, but that he would come through this unharmed. He would pass through death, and be vindicated as the King of heaven and earth. Had the first criminal understood what he was really saying, and if he had believed it, he would have received what he asked for.

The second criminal asked for the exact same thing, but with different words, and with faith. He said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom" (23:42). He got the irony. He saw through the disgrace, the mocking, and the suffering, and he saw the true King of heaven and earth. This is a marvelous work of the Holy Spirit. He saw that death would not prevent Jesus from coming into his Kingdom. And at this moment, he's the only person who sees Jesus for who he truly is. There were other disciples of Jesus at the cross. They knew Jesus and had heard his teaching, yet they did not see. But this new disciple sees. And I suppose it's because he

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is dying. This is the end for him. The Holy Spirit gives him faith to see Jesus rightly when no one else does. The rest of Jesus' disciples will begin to understand in a few days, after Jesus rises from the dead, but this man is dying now. He doesn't have a few more days.

The Holy Spirit brings people to faith at the right time. For some it is at the beginning of their lives. Others are in the middle. Still others are at the very end. And I don't know why it is this way. It seems to me that it would be better if it were always at the beginning. But it's not, and only God knows why. We trust the Holy Spirit knows what he is doing. And so we pray for those the Holy Spirit is still calling, and we proclaim the good news to them. Perhaps they will be like this criminal, who believes at the right time.

And Jesus says to him, **"Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise"** (23:43). This is pure absolution, that is, forgiveness. There's nothing for him to do. He has no opportunity to make up for his sins. All he can do is hang there and wait until he dies. But one cross over from him, his Redeemer King is paying everything. Then they will enter into paradise. Jesus will be saved from death, and he will bring this criminal with him through death, and into his eternal kingdom.

So this is the statement that proves all of the irony, because all of it has to do with King Jesus and his Kingdom. The criminal asks, "Remember me when you come into your kingdom." And what day does Jesus say that will come to pass? **"Today."** He says, **"Today you will be with me in paradise."** All this stuff about Jesus being a king is not only true, it is also well timed. It was true at his birth. It was true in the middle of Jesus' life. It was true at his resurrection. It is true now and forever. But the identification of Jesus as King is most appropriate at his crucifixion, because that is how he purchases for himself the kingdom. That is how he purchases this criminal next to him, and that is how he purchases you. This is how he redeems you as his own.

So this is the single greatest event in the history of the world: "It was now about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour, while the sun's light failed. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, **"Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!"** And having said this he breathed his last" (23:44-46).

At that moment, God died. God died ... and your eternal redemption was accomplished. You are forgiven. If you ever doubt that, if you ever doubt that you are forgiven, you're going to have to come up with some other explanation for why God would die. God's explanation is that he died to pay for your sin ... all of it. And if you ever think your sin is too great, you'll have to figure out how your sin could be more powerful than Jesus' blood. I assure you, it's not. You are forgiven for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:7). Amen.