

Sermon Manuscript for Vespers, May 20, 2016

IDE Symposium Sermon – Luke 23:34, 39-41; Hymn #713

Preacher: Rev. Troy Peperkorn, Pastor at St. John's Lutheran Church, Reinbeck, IA

In the name of + Jesus. Amen. Let us pray...

Speak, O Lord, your servant listens. Sanctify us in your truth; your word is truth. Amen.

“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” That bunch of antagonists? Jesus seriously wants them to be forgiven? They'd either driven the nails into his hands and feet or stood by while it happened. These were the ones who reviled him, mocked him, and challenged his authority. They don't know what they do? How many of you, brothers, use this prayer for the children of God placed under our care? Or is it more like, “take them from me, Lord, they are too much for me.” Like Jonah, we may say, “yeah, I know you can forgive them, but just don't. They're hopeless little Pharaohs.”

“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” Their ignorance doesn't mean they're innocent. Otherwise, they wouldn't need forgiveness. That's the tragedy. They're guilty and they don't get it. Instead of knocking their heads together, or revealing some pure wrath of God, Jesus prays for them. And indeed, many were turned from their unbelief to faith in the living God. Peter preaches to them later saying, **“And now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ would suffer, he thus fulfilled. Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out.”**

Have we preached in ignorance? As laborers in the harvest, have we dug up the grain with the weeds? Have we scattered poison instead of the pure Word? When we preach wrongly in ignorance, we still bear the guilt. The warnings for false preachers is downright disturbing. Drowning and death and the fire of Sodom are appropriate punishments for those who lead God's little ones astray. Lord, have mercy on our hearers! Our Lord's prayer for his enemies, includes not only our enemies, as his servants, but you and I as well.

We need Jesus praying for us. We need the forgiveness of sins because we don't know what we do. While we were still sinners, God made some of the ungodly men into pastors.

From God can nothing move me;

He will not step aside

But gently will reprove me

And be my constant guide.

He stretches out His hand

In evening and in morning,

My life with grace adorning

Wherever I may stand.

On the cross, Jesus fulfills his own words spoken earlier, **“But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in**

heaven.” Unfortunately, that sometimes means us. Sometimes, we're the enemies our Lord prays for. Lord, have mercy on us!

Now, we're to pray for our enemies also. Those acting in ignorance or willfully. As pastors, our enemies are most often Christ's. Being reviled for the sake of Jesus is a fruit of our call. That is when Jesus' prayer on the cross become ours. Not for our sake, but because our enemies are attacking Christ. Brothers, this can go to our heads.

If we want persecution it's pretty easy to find it. If it makes you feel like you're doing something, evidence that you're preaching the right thing, then seek after persecution. But there's no need. Seeking after a cross on our own is arrogant. There's already one placed upon you. It's heavy enough on its own. It's so heavy in fact, that we can twist it into self-pity; a self-absorbed dwelling on our suffering. Or, for pastors, a martyr complex of sorts. Because *that's* what we need, one more way to isolate ourselves from God and man.

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.”

The due rewards for our deeds is what Jesus takes on the cross. Our pride, self-pity, and ignorant preaching. In him, there is no condemnation. He suffered the weight of sin and condemnation. He was utterly isolated hanging there. He even bore the sin of his enemies. We are not alone in our pulpits and in prayer. We're certainly not alone at the Table of our Lord! We're brothers who have been blessed to dwell in unity by the Spirit. We share in our sufferings together under Christ. No preacher bears the weight of everyone's sin. That's Christ's burden alone. No preacher holds the salvation of their hearers in their hands. That glory is reserved for God alone.

We can neither destroy nor save the Church. The trials of the pastor may threaten us, but we've already won. Peace is ours. The Church remains because Christ rules it alone. From the cross comes all our glory and strength. No condemnation or sin remains that can overthrow Christ's holy bride.

The Lord my life arranges;
Who can His work destroy?
In His good time He changes
All sorry into joy.
So let me then be still:
My body, soul, and spirit
His tender care inherit
According to His will.

In the name of + Jesus. Amen.