

## Meditation 1

The world around us grows increasingly post-Christian in its worldview. The moral shift from sacred to secular has left more than one scratching their head in disbelief. We like to believe that this is the first time such a thing has ever happened in the history of the world but it is not. The Apostle Paul once spoke of the worldview of his day which was largely at odds with the realities spoken into existence by God. He said *"For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God."* This Good Friday we contemplate all that many would call foolish, which leaves us breathless and repentant over our sin but expectant over all that it means as folly gives way to wisdom.

### **Christ's First Statement from the Cross: Forgiveness as recorded in Luke 23:32-34**

Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed.<sup>33</sup> When they came to the place called the Skull, there they crucified him, along with the criminals—one on his right, the other on his left.<sup>34</sup> Jesus said, *"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."*

### ***1<sup>st</sup> candle extinguished***

Have you ever heard anything so ridiculous? What injustice has just played out in the early morning in Jerusalem! The Sanhedrin had entertained liars to produce a vindictive verdict against the One who had made them look foolish at every turn. Pilate had proven to be fearful of the mobs to release a man he clearly knew was innocent, pretending a little water could wash his guilt in the matter clean. Now at the hands of the soldiers who had made sport of Him: the lashings, the beatings, the mockery. Jesus was just a raw bloody mess as they fixed Him to the cross. Why should any of these men be forgiven? Is He delirious from the abuse and the pain of it all? Why not lash out? Why not blast them all from the earth with the same voice that called them into existence? None of this makes any sense!

Ah, but then there is one who is not there, at least not in body. One more foolish than any of the others. One who lies to self in order to soothe the pain of sin pretending it's really not all that bad after all. Others do it too. One who is weaker in will than Pilate would have ever allowed himself to be, denying the clear Law of God because someone might make fun of them or be less than understanding. One who has lashed out, clenched fists, mocked others in more ways than any will ever know. He does this for me! Endures this for me! Forgives this for me ... forgives even me as my sin hangs heavier than His own body upon those nails!

Oh God, it's absolute foolishness that You should love me, love us, love a world of sinners this much. That You would give Your Son for them, for us. In truth, it's all so foolish to me too. But in Your wisdom, You forgive! And all that we might be Your own.

**Hymn 651:1,3** *"In Hopelessness and Near Despair"* **Choir sings in place of hymn at 7:00 pm**

## Meditation 2

### Christ's Second Statement from the Cross: Salvation as recorded in Luke 23:39-43

One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: "Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!" <sup>40</sup> But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence? <sup>41</sup> We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. 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> Jesus answered him, "*I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.*"

### 2<sup>nd</sup> candle extinguished

Then comes a cry that makes sense to us, but it doesn't come from Jesus, not even the other criminal. No, it's the agonized and angry cry of the first criminal of the cross. If you are God then get down from this instrument of torture and free yourself from these bonds. While You're at it, get me out of here too. How often hasn't that been my cry in this world? It's not fair God! Why should I suffer? Why should I endure whatever it is I must endure? If You are God then there shouldn't be trouble, there shouldn't be pain, there shouldn't be sorrow. "*Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!*"

But then it's the second thief who does what the world would call foolishness as he despairs even of himself and no longer seeks to cover up his sin. Rebuking the first (what a strange place for testimony) he admits that this is exactly where they belong because of their sin. This is exactly where we belong because of OUR sin. No, this is justice but not for Jesus.

There is only one thing left. To pray! To ask Him for forgiveness to rely on Christ's mercy. In hours of sorrow, in moments of pain, when terrorized by trouble, "*Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.*"

And then, well, it boggles the mind. Jesus did not silence the thief! He did not tell him his sin was too gross to forgive or too weighty for heaven. He spoke to him. He gave him everything because of His mercy, because of His grace. Yes, on the cross Jesus thought of that totally undeserving thief and willingly dies for him. On the cross, He bears all of our sins too. Our names are on His heart. As he enters His kingdom, He remembers us. We enter it too! "*I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.*"

**576:1,3** "*Amazing Grace – How Sweet the Sound*"

### Meditation 3

#### Christ's Third Statement from the Cross: Righteousness as recorded in John 19:26-27

When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Dear woman, here is your son," <sup>27</sup> and to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.

#### *3<sup>rd</sup> candle extinguished*

What an astonishing thing! The pain in His body will shortly reach its peak, if it has not already. His enemies scream insults at Him. Where is his family? Where are the disciples? We hear only of John and Mary and few of the women, all others seem to be gone. And most horrible of all: soon comes the cry that lets us know He suffers the torments of hell. But now, in the midst of all this horror, He does this. When all others would be thinking only of themselves, Jesus still fulfills the Law of God. He thinks of others, His mother, His friend.

Here on the cross, stripped of everything, He has nothing to give to them. He cannot provide for their future, there is no money to bestow. He cannot grant them honor, all has been stripped away. But did you notice it in the Gospel accounts of Jesus' dealings with those who suffer? He never ignored them. Indeed, He never even simply dealt with their obvious need but addressed needs never expressed, down to the smallest of details. He touched the leper deprived of human contact for as long as his illness had been with him. He called the woman who had been treated an outcast because of her blood disease "daughter!" When He raised Jairus' daughter from death to life, He urged her parents to give her something to eat. He cared for them. He loves them.

Now, even while in agony, He thinks of His mother and His friend. The Gospel tells us that John cares for Mary from this moment forward and in this honor, John has the consolation that He cares for His friend. Mary the solace that her Son loved her, cared for her, did not leave her alone. How grateful the two would be for this gift as years went on. How amazing that His concern for them would issue forth such a gift even now when complete selfishness would have been understood, justified, considered wisdom. No, even now this foolishness.

Ah, but then we stand here too. What of us? Does God have our needs in His heart: the ones that I clearly see and the ones I don't, which rest on my heart and trouble my sleep? Oh, yes, dear friends! Far more deeply than we could even think on Him, He thinks of us. He thinks of us in eternity as He made His plan to save sinners. He thought of us when He issued forth the first promise to our fallen forefathers. He thinks of us at the hour of incarnation when the time had fully come and work or redemption was at hand. Even now my sin upon His shoulders, he does not rage against me. How could He? Our names are engraved upon His heart. For us He is overcome with love. He is righteous in this moment, in every moment of His perfection for us!

It's all too much! I sink in disgust at the foot of the cross for all my weakness and sin. How can He think of me? Why would He think of me? Ah, remember what He said of those who hear His Word? We are His mother, and His brothers, and His sisters. Wordless, at least for now, in wonder and in awe, ingratitude to deep for expression, we watch, we wait, we listen, and we receive from Him, in this hour, grace heaped upon grace. His righteousness for our sin.

**Hymn 431 v.1,2,6** *"Oh, Perfect Life of Love."*

## Meditation 4

### Christ's Fourth Statement from the Cross: Substitution as recorded in Matthew 27:45-46

From the sixth hour until the ninth hour darkness came over all the land. <sup>46</sup> About the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" - which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

### 4<sup>th</sup> candle extinguished

"My God, My God" it is no longer "Father". For now, that loving bond is ripped away. Yet God remains God. Jesus still owes perfect love and uncomplaining obedience. Any curse at His own treatment by God, any complaint that it isn't fair, well it would have been rebellion. It would be sin.

But then this is why He is here. So, He cries out the first words of Psalm 22, to let us know what is really happening here. The Scriptures are being fulfilled but there is nothing mechanical about that. Instead, it is the most profound of mysteries mingled with the most horrible suffering. How can God abandon God when in the Trinity they are one in essence? How could the Father and the Son ever have agreed to and willed this horror? The Father loved the Son of His own essence. The Son loved the Father and did so in the human nature every moment consciously, obeying Him, submitting to His will. Not a thought, not a deed, ever had the slightest fault or flaw. Still here it is: God abandoned by God, who had loved Him, served Him perfectly.

The suffering is real. In fact, it is worse than anything you or I will ever endure for on top of the physical pain Jesus suffers the very torments of hell. To be abandoned by God, to lose all of His mercy and kindness, all of His love – that is the essence of Hell. But at least those in hell would have to admit they have earned it, deserved it. But not Jesus, He deserves not one shred of it. More than that, those in hell suffer only for their own transgression. As Jesus suffers innocently; He suffers for the sins of the whole world.

So how shall we answer this anguished cry of innocence? It's all because of me Jesus. It is because the Father loves me and does not want me to perish as I deserve. It is so the filth of my sin would be washed away in Your holy precious blood. This should be my suffering but You stand in my place!

Here indeed is wonder upon wonder, miracle multiplied by miracle, amazement that knows no bounds, folly the world will never truly understand, God is abandoned by God. God wills it for God and does it all for me, He is my substitute! And because of the power of His Word, I believe it! It's mine!

**Hymn 432:1,3,4 "O Dearest Jesus"**

## Meditation 5

### Christ's Fifth Statement from the Cross: Fulfillment as recorded in John 19:28-29

Later, knowing that all was now completed, and so that the Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, "I am thirsty." <sup>29</sup> A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus' lips.

### 5<sup>th</sup> candle extinguished

It is too great to wrap the mind around. In His life here in this world, Jesus fulfilled over 300 Old Testament prophecies. Some have tried to say that it was all just so carefully staged. He had studied and methodically moves through life to fulfill each statement. This in itself is improbable. But now even in the anguish of the cross another prophecy fulfilled.

He thirsts. The Son of God is parched. His body beaten and wrecked, mistreated to extent that would have left all others dead, suffering even the removal of the Father's love, hell itself in His torment. His tongue, like his strength, is dried up like a potshard and sticks to the roof of His mouth.

Read Psalm 22, tarry there on this day. It is a blow-by-blow account of what Jesus has and is enduring. Everything from the mockery and abuse to the very words which have come from His mouth. It's statistically impossible! It's absolutely amazing! It's for me!

Yes, the Scriptures are clear on this point too. This fulfillment has been accomplished to bring you to Him. It has been done that we might bow down in praise and worship. It has been done that we would believe and live, not in a world a sin but eternally with Him in heaven. Our rooms are being prepared, made ready for our arrival as this Jesus rules all things for us. The promises of our forgiveness are fulfilled.

The Psalmist finishes with one simple statement that echoes into eternity. It seems too good to be true ... but it is! He (Jesus) has done it! You are saved!

**Hymn 435 v. 1,5,6** *"Jesus in Your Dying Woes"*

## Meditation 6

### Christ's Sixth Statement from the Cross: Completion as recorded in John 19:30

When he had received the drink, Jesus said, "It is finished." With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

### 6<sup>th</sup> candle extinguished

It's a message we struggle to understand. It is but one word Loudly spoken: Tetelestai ... It is Finished! The world immediately cries "impossible!" It may be done for Jesus but there is still so much for us to do. We must live in such a way that gain this prize He has won. We must grasp the forgiveness He so willingly holds out. We must do something!

They all would call Him a liar here even in His final moments. Jesus says all is done and He means it. Yes dear Christian, Behold how great the love of the Father that He sent His Son to suffer the penalty of our guilt fully, perfectly, completely! Behold how beyond measure is the love of the Son that He willingly came and endured it all for me, even for me, and for you, even for you! Behold the love so above all understanding that He sent and still sends the Holy Spirit in Word and in Sacraments so that – are you ready for it? – we might actually believe this message so beyond our human reason, so utterly past human love or sentiment.

"It is Finished!" My penalty hanging over me is paid for in full! The devil's chains are shattered and hell's claim to my guilt-ridden body and soul are cancelled! All the righteous wrath of God is gone! The fear of His anger when I suffer in life, the fear of death as I approach the next, all of it is done for! The dread though that I must do something to earn God's favor, the burden of knowing that nothing in me can undo what I have done, all that is gone! IT IS FINISHED!! Listen to that Word! Jesus, and Jesus alone – the Son of God and Mary's Son – He has done it all, fulfilled it all, finished it all!

May this message never grow old; for there is not a day, not an hour, not a moment, when I do not need Your finished work for me. Therefore give me this my gracious God, May I Hear these words and cry out with the church of every generation: Thee we adore, O Savior, because by your holy cross and passion You have redeemed the world – and therefore have redeemed me, even me!

**Hymn 396v. 1, 6, 7** *"Christ the life of all the living"*

## Meditation 7

### **Christ's Final Statement from the Cross: Commitment as recorded in Luke 23:44-46**

It was now about the sixth hour, and darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour,<sup>45</sup> for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two.<sup>46</sup> Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." When he had said this, he breathed his last.

### **Christ candle is removed**

It sounds ridiculous when we say it. This is not a defeat. How could it be? With His dying breath, He quotes His powerful Word. Psalm 31 is on His lips as He calls in peace to God and addresses Him as "Father" again. It was the Father who sent Him, the Father who so loved the world that He would spare His Son no agony, no torment, to accomplish our redemption. It was the Father who sent Him with this loving goal in mind, giving His Son the honor only He could win and that by the cross, the honor of being the Savior of the World (Phil. 2:9-11). Jesus dies not in defeat but in triumph. He was perfectly committed to the work and as it draws to its perfect completion He trust his Father still completely.

Because He does we can pray Psalm 31 as well. That's why He came – to put this prayer into our hearts and souls to pray as we fall asleep tonight and in the hour of our death, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit."

*It was Preparation Day (that is, the day before the Sabbath). So as evening approached, 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. Pilate was surprised to hear that he was already dead. Summoning the centurion, he asked him if Jesus had already died. When he learned from the centurion that it was so, he gave the body to Joseph. 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. Mark 15:42–46*

### **The Loud Noise.....Silence.....The Lord's Prayer**

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever and ever. Amen.**

**Hymn 430: "Stricken, Smitten, and Afflicted"**

## Meditation 8

### 1 Corinthians 1:18-31

<sup>18</sup> For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. <sup>19</sup> For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate."<sup>20</sup> Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? <sup>21</sup> For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. <sup>22</sup> Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, <sup>23</sup> but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, <sup>24</sup> but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. <sup>25</sup> For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength.<sup>26</sup> Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. <sup>27</sup> But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. <sup>28</sup> He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, <sup>29</sup> so that no one may boast before him. <sup>30</sup> It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. <sup>31</sup> Therefore, as it is written: "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord."

### Christ candle is returned

It's over. It's done. Now we catch our breath as the lifeless body of our Savior rests in the tomb. But even this is foolishness, for in His death is life. In defeat there is victory. In the Cross there is salvation.

Oh, I know, the world may not understand it. It may scorn the message even as we rejoice. But rejoice we will! For when we gather together again it will be amidst the confusion of women at the tomb and the disciples who struggle to comprehend it. Death will not hold Him and because He lives so do we, both now and forever with Him.

It may seem foolish and weak, even lowly and despised, but it is the message we need. Because I can do nothing ... Christ has done it all!

May we proclaim it dear friends! May we tell the world of Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, <sup>24</sup> but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. <sup>25</sup> For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength.

### Blessing

Hymn 783:1,5,6,7 "Abide with Me"