

Mid-week Lent V
The Passion According to St. Luke: On the Way to Crucifixion
St. Luke 23:26-32

In the name of Jesus. Amen.

Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. 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!" Then they will begin to say to the mountains, "Fall on us," and to the hills, "Cover us." For if they do these things when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?

It's not often that Jesus says something that sounds so hopeless. About the only time I can think of that comes near to this is when He said of Judas that it would have been better if he had not been born. (cf. Matthew 26:24) With regard to Judas, you know why Jesus said of him what he said. Jesus selected him specifically to play the part of betrayer. I won't say that Jesus condemned the man to that role, but knowing all things in His divinity, He knew that the role would lead the man to faithlessness and condemnation. Jesus desires all men to be saved (cf. 1 Timothy 2:4), and so this hopeless-sounding statement from Christ regarding His disciple must be understood in light of that. Rather than seeing the man condemn Himself, it would have been better had he never been born. At the risk of putting words in Jesus' mouth, I imagine He might say the same thing about all who are condemned.

In tonight's text, the hopeless-sounding sentiment isn't Christ's own, though spoken by Him, but the people that are weeping for Him. More appropriately, it would be of the residents of Jerusalem.

Jesus had just been condemned to death by Pilate, spurred on by the crowd who demanded that a thief and murderer be released so that Jesus would be crucified. Pilate recognized the Jesus' innocence, but seeking to quell a riot, condemns Him to death to spare his own life. How about that? Jesus died in place of Pilate?

The innocent Jesus, weighed down with the sin of the world and His own cross beam, was making His way to Golgotha. The cross beam was too much, so they compelled another man bear the burden. "Take up your cross and follow me." (cf. Luke 9:23) "Bear one another's burdens." (cf. Galatians 6:2) If ever there was an example of doing these things, it's Simon of Cyrene, I guess. Nevertheless, it is along this trek to Golgotha that the women wept and Jesus spoke those hopeless-sounding words. The women knew Jesus to be innocent of all that He was bearing and about to endure.

So, He turned to them and spoke. "[B]ehold, the days are coming when they will say, 'Blessed are the barren and the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!' Then they will begin to say to the mountains, 'Fall on us,' and to the hills, 'Cover us.'" What was coming would be worse for them than what they are weeping for now. Some 35 or so years later, Rome would sack Jerusalem and destroy the temple. The people would be made to suffer. On that day in tonight's reading, though, it was only Jesus who would suffer—suffer for them and for you—and He told the women not to weep for Him but for themselves.

Yes, the coming destruction was something over which to weep. And that not because it's a terrible thing to witness, and even worse to live through, but because of the reason for the destruction. This is a world of sin, and as such, it is always doomed to destruction. A far greater destruction is coming, one that cannot be matched by what Jerusalem suffered at the hands of Rome, but one to which the destruction of Jerusalem points. Jesus will return in glory, the sun will be darkened, the moon will not give its light, heaven and earth will pass away—and to say all of that is putting things extremely lightly. And if you are caught up in all of that destruction and condemned to an eternal

existence of suffering in the Lake of Fire, it would be because you never acknowledged your sinfulness and the forgiveness, redemption, and salvation that is found only in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Dear hearers, do not weep for Jesus, weep for yourselves. All that you have heard that Jesus endured these last five weeks, which you will hear in culmination this coming Sunday and the Friday following, can be and is tear-inducing. An innocent Man spills His blood for you. Realizing this and acknowledging it, hearing it all again and again...who wouldn't waver in voice and shed a tear?

But you know how this all ends for Him.

Yes, He was scourged within an inch of His life, as the whip rips skin and flesh from His bones. Yes, He was nailed to the cross, crying out in agony as nails pierce through His flesh—the pain must have been excruciating. Yes, He cried out in agony to His Father who had forsaken Him—a grief unlike any you have ever felt or can even imagine. Yes, He died under the weight of your sins and the full wrath of God. Only those who continue to mock Him and deny that He is the Son of God could dare hold back tears at that.

He was buried.

He rose again! Christ is risen! He lives, who once was slain.

Every Lent and Holy Week, you recount the Passion of Christ and His suffering, death, and burial as a believer fully focused on His resurrection. His grave remains empty because He lives!

Don't weep for Jesus, weep for yourselves. Decry your own sinfulness. Shed tears, because your flesh is corrupt and you have transgressed the Law of God. Cry out in agony because you are completely guilty where Jesus was innocent. Shed tears for yourself and you mortify your flesh. Repent and believe in the Gospel.

Hear the Gospel: your guilt and shame is taken from you. Jesus Christ suffered with it and rose again victorious over death. While you still live in this Vale of Tears, the life you now live you live in faith. You have been crucified with Christ; therefore, it is no longer you who live, but Christ who lives in you, so that the life you now live in the flesh you live by faith in the Son of God who loved you and gave Himself for you. (cf. Galatians 2:20) He died, but He lives again, and He has given you the victory so that when you die to this Valley of Death, you will live again forever with Him in the new heavens and new earth. Shed your tears now on this side of eternity, because in life everlasting, the Lord God will wipe away tears from all eyes and faces. (cf. Isaiah 25:8; Revelation 7:17, 21:4) This is the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ for you.

Jesus was incarnate, was born, was led to Golgotha, was crucified, and was buried for you. His death for sin is your death to sin. The forgiveness He won on the cross as He spilled His blood covers your sin. To you, the blood of the Lamb was applied for life and you were declared righteous as you were washed in the water and the Word, and it is your daily sign and seal of a life redeemed from this Vale of Tears. For by that water, blood, and Word, you are the righteousness of God. You are forgiven for all of your sins.

In the name of Jesus. Amen.