

A Sermon from LUKE 23:39-43:

Faith in CHRIST brings hope and turns us outward!

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I. INTRODUCTION

We live in a time of trouble. In a day of fear. In a land of worry. Among a people that has forgotten The Grace and Forgiveness of GOD. But as ELCA ¹ Bishop Mark Hanson rightly observes, “We are being called to bear witness to our Faith at the intersection of fear and hope.” It should be our prayer, “that fear does not turn us inward, but that hope in CHRIST focuses us outward!” ²

Fear turns us inward, but Faith in CHRIST brings hope and turns us outward!

II. A SCRIPTURE – LUKE 23:39-43

³⁹ And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on Him, saying, If Thou be CHRIST, save Thyself and us.

⁴⁰ But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear GOD, seeing thou art in the same condemnation?

⁴¹ And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but This Man hath done nothing amiss.

⁴² And he said unto JESUS, Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy Kingdom.

⁴³ And JESUS said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise. [KJV]

III. THE UNREPENTENT THIEF AND THE REPENTENT THIEF

In LUKE 23:39-43, Saint Luke brings us to The Cross of our Redeemer, where sinful man crucified The Son of GOD. There we find the unrepentant thief on a cross on one side of JESUS, and the repentant thief on a cross on His other side. In LUKE 23:39, the haughty thief mocks GOD’s Anointed One, as have we all when we embrace the darkness of sin, “...If Thou be CHRIST, save Thyself and us!” ³

But on CHRIST’s other side was the repentant thief. In LUKE 23:40-41, he calls to his fellow sinner, “...Dost not thou fear GOD, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but This Man hath done nothing amiss!” ⁴

The repentant thief lays his soul prostrate before The Son of GOD, with the ashes of Lent upon the forehead of his soul. We may hear him crying out in The Words of David from PSALM 51:9-12, O Lord, “Hide Thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O GOD; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from Thy Presence; and take not Thy HOLY SPIRIT from me!” ⁵

¹ 1, “Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.”

² 2, Bishop Mark S. Hanson, “Witnessing in Troubled Times.” The Lutheran, March/2009, p 54.

³ 3, KJV, LUKE 23:39.

⁴ 3, KJV, LUKE 23:40-41.

⁵ 3, KJV, PSALM 51:9-11.

So we are called to follow the repentant thief, who bears witness in Faith at the intersection of fear and hope: His Faith overcame his fear, and his soul turned outward towards CHRIST, rather than inward towards Hell, “Do you not fear GOD?” He embraced GOD’s Mercy, for he confessed and repented of his sin in LUKE 23:42, “Lord, remember me when You come into Your Kingdom!” He humbly received GOD’s Grace, for The Savior answered him in LUKE 23:43, “This very day, you shall be with Me in Paradise!”

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IV. A MATTER OF DEFINITION - FAITH, MERCY & GRACE

But what is Faith in GOD? As Martin Luther says, “Faith is a living, unshakeable confidence [and trust in, and knowledge of,] GOD's Grace... [which] makes a person joyful, confident, and happy with regard to GOD and all creatures.... Through Faith, a person will do good to everyone without coercion, willingly and happily; he will serve everyone, suffer everything for the love and praise of GOD, Who has shown him such Grace...!”⁶ Faith is the beginning of overcoming fear with hope in The Lord.

And what is Divine Mercy? Pope John Paul II says that Divine “Mercy is The Second Name of Love. [It] ...is GOD’s Love poured out in creating us, in redeeming us, and in sanctifying us. [It] ...is GOD’s Love poured out upon the unlovable and upon the unforgivable... [It is GOD’s] love in action” on our behalf at The Cross of CHRIST. It is Who The Lord is, “Love and Mercy itself.”⁷ By His Mercy, we enter into His Presence because The Son of GOD has paid The Price on our behalf for our sins. It is by GOD’s Mercy that we are forgiven and made whole again in Him, rebuking the darkness of sin and separation of man from GOD and his fellow man.

And what is Divine Grace? Noah Webster says that Grace is “the free unmerited love and favor of GOD” poured out on those who call out to Him, “Lord, remember me when You come into Your Kingdom!” It is His “renewing [of] the heart and restraining us from sin.” It is “the application of CHRIST’s righteousness to the sinner,” bringing about “a state of reconciliation to GOD.”⁸ And as You have said to Saint Paul, O Lord, so also You say to us, “...My Grace is sufficient for thee...”⁹ And so our hope in CHRIST turns us outward to witness in a lost and broken world.

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⁶ 4, Martin Luther, “Preface to The Letter of St. Paul to the Romans,” paragraph 15, “Faith is...”

⁷ 5, Mercy Minutes, p 32. Pope John Paul II speaks of GOD’s Mercy.

⁸ 6, Webster’s 1828 Dictionary, “Grace,” noun, # 2,3,4,5.

⁹ 3, KJV, II CORINTHIANS 12:9.

V. FAITH IN CHRIST TURNS US OUTWARD

With the repentant thief on the cross, who by GOD's Grace, placed his Faith and Hope in The Lord, we too are called to embrace The Grace of CHRIST and humbly turn the eyes of our hearts to Him! The darkness would have us surrender and be overcome. But CHRIST has overcome the darkness of fear.

So JESUS declares the sins of the repentant thief wiped away. He absolves the sinner of his sin guilt before The Law of GOD by applying the payment of His Sacrifice on our behalf! The debt is paid. The pardon before The Judgement Seat of CHRIST has been issued. And the repentant thief's soul is declared clean at The Cross! ¹⁰

As Saint Clement of Rome says, "Let us fix our eyes on CHRIST's Blood and understand how precious It is to His Father. For, poured out for our salvation, It has brought to the whole world The Grace of repentance" in The Son! ¹¹

VI. IN CONCLUSION

Yes, we live in troubled times. In a day of fear. In a land of distress and worry. But The Lord calls all of us to turn outward as His witnesses of Hope to a world lost in fear! And to do so boldly!

Let us therefore always proclaim in word and deed with Saint Paul in ROMANS 5:1-2, "Therefore being justified by Faith, we have peace with GOD through our Lord JESUS CHRIST. By Whom also we have access by Faith into This Grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in Hope of The Glory of GOD!" ¹²

Fear turns us inward, but Faith in CHRIST brings hope and turns us outward!
AMEN.

¹⁰ 6, Webster's 1828 Dictionary, "Absolution," noun.

¹¹ 7, CCC, # 1432, p 400, St. Clement of Rome on Penance.

¹² 3, KJV, ROMANS 5:1-2.

VII. REFERENCES

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