

St. Luke 23:27-31

Dear Friends in Christ,

Vance Havner wrote:

The early Christians did not transform the world, they transcended it. It was only in later years, when Constantine (the early 4th century Roman emperor who converted to Christianity)...made a Christian profession easy and the church ceased looking for the Lord to return and began trying to build heaven on earth, that Christians became "reasonable" and the world could live comfortably with them. But let it not be forgotten that a twice-born, Spirit-filled Christian is always a contradiction to this old world.

He's right! The church has labored constantly to blend with the world; to make itself reasonable and attractive. But the world has been marching deeper and deeper into the dregs of **corrupted living** and **lawlessness**. If the church is willing to compromise with the world - if what you believe doesn't make any difference - then of what value is the church to the Lord?

What unfolds for us from Scripture this morning is not just something that happened to Jesus a long time ago. It's a something that is very, very...contemporary. The question this morning. . .

IF THEY DO THESE THINGS?

I. The Moment.

The context of the moment in which we find ourselves with Jesus is this: Jesus had endured the beating, the scourging, the crown of thorns. He was the one described by Isaiah: "despised and rejected by men." As He was led through the streets of Jerusalem being forced to Golgotha, the focus sharpens: "...a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief." (Is. 53:3) It was as He had informed His disciples: "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed...". (Lk. 9:22) They never grasped the "on the third day be raised" part.

Most still don't grasp it. The issues of the presence of Christ in this world were and are - exclusively - why humans suffer and die and what's going to happen to them after death. Those are the issues. Nothing to do with making a wonderful world! It isn't a pretty picture humans want to think about - including most church people. It's the picture most don't want in their earthbound albums.

Not everyone, however, mocked and jeered Him. "And there followed him a great multitude of the people and of women who were mourning and lamenting for him." (Lk. 23:27) No doubt, there were those who were genuinely sorrowful for various reasons. And there were those who were what we call *professional mourners*.

But it's these words we must hear - and wonder if they heard:

But turning to them Jesus said, "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.'" (vss. 28-30)

Jesus points them to the horrific suffering, death and separation that would befall Jerusalem at the hands of the Romans in 70 A.D.

II. The Question.

And so, the question: “For if they do these things when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?” The “they” are the Jewish leaders and people who wanted Him crucified. The **Green Wood** is Jesus. We could say, **the Green Tree**. They would torment, mock and kill Him. What would happen to them as the result of **rejection**?

Remember Adam and Eve? Remember God’s instruction to them? “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.” (Gen 2:16-17) Remember? They went for the tree that brought decay and death. In a sense, they destroyed the very essence of the Garden of Eden - the perfection - and turned it into “dry wood” filled with decay and death because of disobedience to God - **Sin - Rejection!**

Some of the saddest words in Scripture are these: “He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.” (Jn. 1:11) The people of that time wanted a worldly Christ - a hero who would resolve their worldly issues - a political Savior. The words Jesus spoke to Pilate were not heard - fell on unbelieving ears: “My Kingdom is not of this world.” Not! And won’t be!

Christ was and is what Isaiah described: “There comes forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.” (Is 11:1) If people destroy that fruit....what, then?? What’s left but death and separation from God?

The words of Jesus are ever so appropriate. God help us to hear them - and **listen** to them:

“Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.” (John 15:4-6)

As if you haven’t heard those verses many times. And so, the question: “For if they do these things when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?” To reject the Green Wood - the Green Tree - is a disconnect from the source of everlasting life. The answer to the question is chilling: “If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers (dry wood!); and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.”

This Moment.

Understand this: The question Jesus asked these people becomes even more stunning today as we remember that Jesus’ words about the destruction of Jerusalem foreshadow the final judgment. His words to those weeping for Him on the way to Calvary, “Then they will begin to say to the mountains, ‘Fall on us,’ and to the hills, ‘Cover us.’” (30-31) Those words parallel these words: “Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.” (Matt. 24:30) **Tribes - will - mourn!** A Bad Moment - Forever!!

It has been observed:

Our cynical world tries to laugh off serious things it doesn’t want to think about, so hell has become a subject that is just ignored or joked about. Even in the church “fire and brimstone preaching” has gone out of style. But our world needs to hear and know - and we need to hear and know - that apart from Jesus, without Him as our Savior, we stand under God’s eternal judgment and condemnation because of our sin.

The question Jesus asked speaks directly to us. We are, by ourselves and without God's intervention, dry wood. Jesus said, "Everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin." (John 8:34) This isn't a matter of numbers - of how many sins. This isn't a matter of one sin being worse than another. Our first parents ate a piece of fruit - committed the first sin (one!) and received suffering, death and hell as immediate judgement. This isn't a matter of looking at others. It's a matter of looking at ourselves, our thinking, our miserable excuses, our spiritual laziness.

Everything we see points us to the reason Jesus was willing to bear the Cross and march to Calvary. He loved us, had pity on us because of our spiritual helplessness and would do everything necessary to earn our forgiveness and eternal life. It all poured out to us in the Word and Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

The "fruit" of this world is always there for the taking. It's ultimate "blessing" is rot, dry wood, death. What we are given in Christ is life. As the Psalmist said:

Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers. (Ps. 1:1-3)

The question has to be: *What are we doing?*

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott

March 13, 2016

Luke 23:27-31:

“God’s Question: If They Do These Things?”

I. The Moment.

II. The Question.

III. This Moment.

*Pilgrim Lutheran Church
2155 North Oakland Avenue
Decatur, Illinois 62526*