

March 13, 2016 “The Moment” Luke 23:44-46

There are moments in our lives when everything seems to come to a stand-still. Something of great importance has occurred. We tend to remember where we were during that moment for the rest of our lives. I remember the moment in which I learned of the death of the American President John F. Kennedy. In fact I had just handed in my paper. I was writing the departmental History Exam. Handing in my paper, I was escorted to the door of the classroom, where I was met by the teacher who had supervised us for the first half of the time period allotted. All the students in Lakeview High School knew that Mr. Manns was a former American. It was he who informed me that Kennedy had been shot, and had died. The moment...is burned into my memory.

I remember the moment when I was first aware that I was in the same room as Barbara was. It was the Fellowship Hall...the basement...of Oliver Road Presbyterian Church, in the city of Port Arthur which is now the northern half of the city of Thunder Bay, Ontario. It was a meeting of the Young People's Society of that congregation. I was there to learn more about the Bible. To do so in the company of other teenagers. I was in an instant hot, sweaty and had difficulty breathing. I remember being terrified that everyone knew what was happening...I could not take my eyes off of her. We were separated by 24 feet of table top. And I was frantically trying to cope with that uncomfortableness that is born of being bitten by the “love bug”. I will never be able to forget the moment.

Luke tells us when the moment occurred in real time. “It was about the 6th hour.” In fact that signifies in Judea during the Roman occupation that it was mid-day. We would have said it as noon. The Good News Bible with its attempt to put these things in

modern newspaper language says, "It was about 12 o'clock when the sun stopped shining, and darkness covered the whole country until three o'clock." The sixth hour to the ninth. Friday afternoon. Noon until three. That's when the moment was breaking on the whole of the world, the moment to which crucifixion was dedicated, the moment in which the sentence of Pilate bore its terrible fruit.

It was a moment of physical darkness. There are those who in the attempt to make the Bible a collection of documents created solely by human hands and human minds attach minimal importance to this reality. Those who want us to be aware only of the authorship of Luke with all his personal limitations and the fullness of his humanity, point out that such a literary device was often used in documents of antiquity to persuade us that we are reading something that is significant. I can only point out the first chapters of the Gospel of St. Luke to appeal to you to see that Luke is not playing that game. He is not trying to write a best seller. He is not trying to become famous for his wit and his way with a pen.

He did state that he wanted Theophilus to know for certain, the details of the story of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. He has promised that the details in his account are to the best of his ability arranged in an orderly fashion...attention to a time line. He has promised Theophilus that the things he is including when it comes to detail are included because he saw them himself, or got the details from really important and dependable eye witnesses. He has promised Theophilus that he believes the details in this account to be as truthful as he could make them. And Luke told Theophilus what his bias is concerning these matters. He believes in God. He believes God is involved in the lives of people in this world. While he is a physician and to some extent a man of science...he also

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believes in the miracles of God. Not because someone brainwashed him. Because of things he has seen and heard with his own eyes and his own ears...his mind engaged the whole time.

About noon darkness descended. The darkness lasted till around 3:00 pm. And what I have just said is borne out in this little detail...Matthew 27:45 says this: "Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over the whole land." Mark 15:33 says this: "But when the sixth hour was come there was darkness over the land until the ninth hour." And while it is true John's Gospel makes no mention of this detail at all, it is also clear he was focussed on other details that he saw with his own eyes and John was at pains to say...he told the truth, and he witnessed what he wrote about. In that there was no council meeting to write down the life of Jesus and unify their testimony...it is significant that three of the 4 Gospel writers tell us about the great darkness. It was part of the experience of the moment during which Jesus actually died on the cross.

What happened you may well ask? I have no way of telling you with certainty, except to say, there is a certain logic to this detail. Even in Judea it does not normally grow dark between noon and 3:00 in the afternoon. In the history of Biblical interpretation there has been an assumption it was an eclipse of the sun. And my first reaction to that interpretation which is recognized by among others, John Calvin, my first reaction was, "O a natural phenomenon." Luke is at pains to make the point there was nothing "natural" about the occurrence.

To be sure, Luke says in the most fundamental fashion, "the sun stopped shining." Right that creates darkness doesn't it. And Luke immediately ties that fact to another. "The curtain of the

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Temple in Jerusalem was torn in two.” This is the curtain that closed off the holy of holies chamber in the Temple. It was the holiest place in the building. The spot where God was believed to be in residence. The curtain separated God's glory from the priests who worked in the Temple and attended to the details of serving God in the midst of His chosen people. “For no one shall see God and live.” What Luke says is that in the midst of that darkness and and at that particular moment an invisible hand destroyed the curtain that was believed to separate God and mankind for our safety.

In the midst of darkness God breaks out. And He does so in such a way...he does not pass through the curtain...leaving no evidence of its being touched. He does not make a hole that might be repaired and pass through it. He breaks it in two. Tears it in half. To all intents and purposes He destroys the curtain that has separated He and His servants, He and His people. And it is noteworthy that a significant number, among them, Joseph of Arimathea, a significant number of priests and teachers of the Law, pharisees like Paul become in rather a short space of time...part of that growing band of disciples of Jesus. Part of the emerging church, the gathering that worships in the name of Jesus, the Lord who is God Almighty.

The Moment has arrived. It comes in the midst of darkness. Physical and spiritual. It comes with the curtain in the Temple being destroyed beyond repair. And it comes with Jesus “calling out in a loud voice.” Not a whimper in keeping with his wounds and blood loss. Not a whisper as life ebbs away. But as a cry that is heard by everyone who has gathered and stayed through the hours since the nails pierced his wrists and his feet. “Father into your hands I commit my spirit.” When Jesus had said this...writes Luke, wanting us to be certain of what we have been told...He

breathed his last.

It is the Moment. You can try to say it quickly. It is the moment when Jesus died. On the cross. And there is a certain accuracy to saying it in those few words. But there is more to it. There is more to it than the execution has been consummated. There is more to it than. He is dead. What do I mean? Well, there is that loud voiced cry. If anyone missed what happened and what was said between the Son and the Father in the Garden of Gethsemane...it is said loudly here at the crucial, moment on the cross. "Yet not my will...but yours be done." Father...He never stopped praying to God,.. Almighty God and calling Him, His Father. "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit. It is the moment of His death. And again, again, as He did so many times, He submits Himself to what the Father is doing. He is the ultimate picture of the faithful Son. He voices His submission. He breathes his last. And never forget...Luke's story is far from over.

And what Luke does not say here, he has related to us in so many other places in his orderly, testimonial account. He is pinned to that cross by the height of human fallenness and held there by the nails for all to see. He died for you. He died for me. He died for all of those who in their time would come and stand where we stand, sit where we sit, and take the details of Luke's account seriously. He died for those who reviled Him. He died for all of those who deny and denied Him. He died for us, because God loves us. That's what the moment when He cried out and breathed His last meant and means and will mean forever...until He comes again.

But that is for another time. We stand at the foot of the cross. And we understand one thing about this moment. "the

punishment that brought us peace was upon Him. And by His wounds (and I will add) by His wounds alone....we are healed.” (Isaiah 53:5)

Let us pray;

Heavenly Father, thank you for sharing your Son with the world and its peoples. We know we are not worthy of so great a gift. Thank you for letting us once again consider the moment on the cross when Jesus died. We thank you for His commitment to your plan to redeem us from all that we do that reflects the reality of sin and its power to corrupt us. To mislead us. To cause us to try and do things on our own, instead of in your sweet and gracious Spirit. Help us like Jesus, to commit our lives into your hands as Jesus did. And help us to find the meaning of happiness, of blessedness in the submission to which faith leads us. In Jesus name we pray. Amen