

March 6, 2016 “Let Him Save....” Luke 23: 35-43

He was watching what was happening through his own fog of pain. The one thing guaranteed by a sentence of death by crucifixion was pain...lots of pain. But in those moments when he could gasp for air, he was watching, he was listening, and he was thinking. Or at least that is the impression Luke leaves in his telling of this gruesome story. All the while Luke labours to deliver the facts to Theophilus, with the assurance that this is the truth, told in an orderly fashion, with a sensitivity to what happened in the order that things unfolded. A history, we would call it today.

And so Luke tells us, three were condemned to die on that Friday. Three bore the burden of the cross beam down the Via Dolorosa, the Way of Suffering, though only two of the condemned had the strength to do so all the way to Calvary. It is Calvaria in Latin, the language of the Empire. Three were fastened that day at the wrists to their cross beams. Three were hoisted into place and then Roman spikes were used to fasten the feet. Three suffered in the sun and the heat of the day.

He watched and he listened through the pain. There was a significant crowd that had gathered, assembled to watch. In the crowd there were members of the Sanhedrin and their staff. They wanted to see that to the last detail things were done right. They wanted to see that Jesus was silenced once and for all. They needed to be able to report that Jesus was dead. In moments between the spasms of pain, from his wounds, from the increasing pressure created by body weight that made it harder and harder to breathe, he heard people talking. Some shouted. He heard their words clearly. They were not kind. No sympathy. A challenge. “He saved others; let Him save Himself if HE is the Christ of God, the promised

Messiah, the Chosen One.”

He listened. He struggled with the logic. “He saved others!” What does that mean? If you tackle that logically the meaning is clear. He saved others. They knew. The stories that everyone had heard second hand were true. Miracles. Water into wine. Cleansing of lepers. Sight to the blind. Hearing to those who were deaf. That man lowered down through the roofing on a house...he carried his bed away. That one at the pool of Siloam who could never make it into the disturbed waters...made whole and sent home. That friend of His who died...they said he was alive. He saved others! They knew there were undeniable facts. “Let Him save Himself, if He is the Christ of God.” But would He?

He struggled to listen. He struggled to process the words. Somewhere in the unfolding of the seconds that became minutes, that became an hour, he saw clearly enough to see the soldiers offering the wine vinegar. Soldiers. If it was good wine, they would have drunk it themselves. But they offered Jesus this sour stuff. And they too challenged him, “If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself!” And the one that offered the wine spat into the dust when Jesus did not drink it.” Pilate had ordered the cross in the middle must bear a sign. This is the King of the Jews. He remembered. There had been an argument over the wording. The Procurator had suddenly become both stubborn and angry. What was it he said? “What I have written, stays written.” What does that mean? Politics? A war of wills? Or...a wave of pain flashed through his body and he lost the thought. His own groaning drowned out the attempt to answer questions only half formed.

He could not remember if he had passed out. He was still

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struggling to breathe when he was suddenly aware of the brilliance, the blinding brilliance of the sunlight. That voice somewhere in the distance off to his right...he recognized it. His brother in arms. Brother in crime. He was railing at Jesus in his own sea of suffering, "If you are Christ, save yourself and save us too." He fought for air, this was getting harder and harder, but he managed it. And then he heard his own voice, reduced in its strength and power. "Don't you fear God?" He gasped for air again. "You are under the same sentence. We are getting what our deeds deserve. Not Him. He has done nothing wrong." He struggled to breathe again. There it was. He knew he was going to die. Everyone in Judea, everyone in the Empire knew that was how this ends. They crucify. You die. And there was that other thought, so clear, so clear. This is no time to waste air. How many breaths do you have left? He gasped again and he managed to say what he was thinking. "Jesus. Remember me. When you come into your kingdom."

And he heard Jesus reply, the words were clear, he heard every one of them. "The truth.....Today you will be with me in paradise."

Luke wanted Theophilus to know. The lamb that was offered was without blemish. He was perfect. He was faithful and obedient. Jesus could never save Himself and be the Shepherd of love...it was always about finding the lost and bringing them home.

Let us pray;

He was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. The punishment that brought us peace, was upon Him, and by his wounds we are healed. Forgive us Father in Heaven.

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Grant that we may taste your forgiveness in the words we hear, the songs we sing, and the promise of the gospel, in the flavour of bread and wine. Amen