

One Thing to Say...Another to Do
Matthew 27:45-46
Lent 4, March 29, 2016
Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

He cried out with a loud voice.

In our consideration of the voices of the passion, we finally after much silence get down to the voice of our Lord. Our Lord has been curiously silent through the entire proceedings. It seems that the only time that He speaks is when He is advancing His own condemnation.

While Luke and John record our Lord saying several different things from the cross, Matthew records only one thing that our Lord says, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani."

He says it in a great voice. After hours of silence, He finally shouts something. The shout indicates great intensity. And in consideration of what He shouts it indicates great surprise.

Our Lord has predicted repeatedly that evil men would kill Him. He pleaded with His disciples that they should know that wicked people would kill Him. Even when Peter tried to dissuade Him from such a fate Jesus had turned and addressed Peter as Satan and told Satan to get behind Him. Peter was thinking the things of men and not the things of God. The things of men have to do with survival and glory. The things of God have to do with humility and shame. The things of men deal with the world as they wish the world should be. The things of God deal with the world as the world really is. In order to deal with the world as it really is evil men will kill Him.

And so now the evil men have done so. And even for our Lord the experience of the death that He died was surprisingly gruesome and He cries out to His Father asking why the Father had abandoned Him.

It goes without saying that when Jesus asks why God has abandoned Him that God has in fact done so. God the Father abandoned God the Son. He forsook Him. This was necessary in order to atone for sin.

People have often wondered what it meant when a worshipper in the Old Testament laid their hands on the sacrifice that they offered at the Tent of Meeting. I think that the liturgical gesture was an indication that the animal now stood in the place of the one offering the animal. Especially if the animal were an offering for sin, the worshipper offering the animal deserved to die for whatever it was that He had done that infringed the holiness of almighty God. God received the animal's life in place of the worshipper's life and when God received the animal's life in place of the worshipper's life, He no longer held the worshipper responsible for the sin that the worshipper had committed. This is called forgiveness. God forgave the worshipper because of the offering of the animal that the worshipper had made.

All of us who have read the book of Hebrews know that an animal on its own cannot take the place of a human life. God did not make animals in His own image. He did make human beings in His own image. God has forbidden us from murdering each other on this basis, but He has given us the animals for food. Therefore our lives are more valuable than the lives of animals. Therefore the sacrifices in the Old Testament on their own cannot take away sins in spite of the fact that the book of Leviticus says that they do.

The only reason those sacrifices worked in the Old Testament was because God said that they would and in God saying that they would they served as pointers to the great sacrifice of Jesus that would take away sin. The sacrifices of the Old Testament instructed humanity that if it is going to have

any standing before God at all, that there would have to be some kind of death in the place of humanity in order to accomplish it. If human sin were to be forgiven, someone would have to die who would match the worth of humanity itself. The death could not be any death. It had to be a substitutionary death. The death had to involve the shedding of blood. Even the book of Hebrews acknowledges that there is no forgiveness without bloodshed.

So Jesus is the sacrifice. He is the incarnate God and therefore His death will match the worth of humanity and then some. He offers His life in place of sinful humanity. You are His worshippers. Therefore He offers His life in place of yours. There is no priest who offers Him unless you count the chief priests who unwittingly fulfilled their vocations by putting Jesus to death. He offers Himself. He makes all of the arrangements. He guarantees and predicts His own death. The death of Jesus involves bloodshed. Sins are forgiven.

If the death of Jesus is to be truly substitutionary, then Jesus must bear all of the punishment for our sin in our place. That means that He cannot simply bear death. He must bear hell as well.

Our sins deserve hell.

Hell is hard to describe. In its essence hell is eternal separation from God. This is not a philosophical separation because people continue to exist in hell and therefore God is there maintaining the existence of hell while people suffer there. But it is a separation from God in any way that counts. Those who are in hell are separated from the goodness of God. They have only themselves for company. That is why when Jesus cries out, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" not only is He indicating that He is suffering hell in our place, He is also describing for us what hell is like.

You don't have any friends in hell. There are some vulgar people who don't mind the idea of going to hell because they believe that they will be there with all of their buddies. Such people are vulgar. You don't have any buddies in hell. The whole idea of hell is loneliness. It is not simply eternal torment in the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels, but it is also experiencing no relief from God or from anyone else.

Hell is your own fault. We learn from our Lord's parables that people in hell continue to try to justify themselves and explain to themselves how they did nothing wrong. That is part of hell. If you want to justify yourself, then you will go to hell and spend eternity trying to justify yourself. There are some who speculate that if hell is God leaving you to yourself for eternity then the sin that you enjoyed so much on this earth will be inflicted upon you for all of eternity. If your sin was greed, you will be eternally greedy and unsatisfied. If your sin was lust, you will be eternally afflicted with lustful thoughts without hope of satisfaction. If your sin was murder, you will be eternally afflicted with bloodlust, etc. You get the idea. You are left alone with your sins. They are all that you wanted in life. Therefore they are all that you get in hell.

Hell is to be without God at all. He does not answer prayer in hell. You cannot appeal to Him in hell. His providence is gone. His mercy is gone. He is gone. He is off busy celebrating with those who confessed their sins and lamented them.

Now if Jesus is truly to be a substitute for you to save you from your sins, then this is what He must endure. We know that He endured it when He cried out, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"

And it is a surprise. That is why He cries out. But like so many of us when we cry out in surprise what comes out of our mouths is absolutely true.

A mystery occurs on the cross. Jesus was appointed to suffer for you in your place and to suffer what you deserve because of your sins. Furthermore Jesus was appointed not only to do that for you, but also for every human being who has ever lived, ever lives, and ever will live. That is a lot of eternities in hell. Jesus suffered them all in spite of the fact that darkness was over the land for only three hours.

It is a mystery. An eternity of hell for each and every human being ever was crammed into a few short hours on the cross. This is why the book of Revelation says that Jesus was slain from the foundation of the world. Since Jesus is suffering for everyone for all of eternity then Jesus was slain from the foundation of the world and remains slain until its end. It is a mystery because Jesus is also risen from the dead and ascended to the right hand of the Father.

It is a mystery and displays the power of God who is able to provide the substitutionary sacrifice for everyone! And yet at the same time make it possible for the One who made that sacrifice to enjoy the fruits of that sacrifice together with us who have received it in eternity.

In other words when you rise from the dead and live forever Jesus will be there and enjoy eternity with you. The nail marks are still in His hands even after the resurrection. That will not go away ever, but He will be there enjoying eternity with you. He will in enjoy a life in the presence of God together with you. God will never leave you. He will never forsake you.

In fact the almighty power of God makes it possible for Jesus to enjoy your life together with you now. In spite of the fact that He suffered on the cross for these present moments while we still live in this flesh, He is here enjoying the blessings of life that God gives to you.

Such blessings have been made possible by His sacrifice.

He cried out. He cried out to show you how terrible it was. He cried out to show you that He suffered it on your behalf. He cried out. The most important voice of the passion has spoken.

In the name of Jesus. Amen.