

And Now Your Voice

Matthew 27:47-54

Lent 5, April 5, 2017

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

We could talk about what it all means.

We could talk about what the tearing in two of the curtain in the temple means. It means that access to God's presence has been granted.

In Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers there is a curtain that hangs between the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place. The Holy Place is the first room that you enter once you enter the Tent of Meeting in the wilderness. The second room is closed off by a curtain. In the second room is the Ark of the Covenant. God's presence is over the Ark of the Covenant. God met with Moses over the Ark of the Covenant. God gave Moses the instructions for the Old Testament Divine Service from over the Ark of the Covenant. God met with Moses face to face as a man meets with his friend over the Ark of the Covenant. The chief priest went in there once a year to make atonement for the sins of the people through a special Divine Service given by God for that purpose.

Therefore access to God was separated. An average person could not go in there. If they did, they died. Even when the chief priest went in there he went in with blood of an animal to atone for his sin so that he would not die while he was in there atoning for the sins of the people of Israel.

When Solomon built the temple the sanctuary was divided into two rooms. The second room was closed off from the first room by a curtain. That curtain was hanging in the temple even at the time of our Lord. It hung there as the sign that the holy God would not dwell with sinful men unless their sins were removed. Only blood sacrifice could remove it. Therefore when Jesus died, the blood sacrifice that removes human sin was made. Access to God's presence was granted. The curtain of the temple spontaneously tore in two. Even the curtain knew that its vocation was completed and that it was no longer necessary.

Once the curtain was torn the temple service was no longer necessary. The Divine Service that God commanded so long ago and that Israel had observed more or less for centuries was at an end. It had performed its service of pointing forward to the great sacrifice that God would make in Jesus Christ. It educated the people on what was required to atone for sin, namely a blood offering and a death. It trained them to look for Him who is perfect. He would be the offering that takes away the world's sins.

That offering was made. The building that was the temple ended its vocation on the day that Jesus Christ died. It was unnecessary. The curtain tore itself in two. Access to God was now granted without the sacrifices or Divine Service of the past. The temple was rendered retired.

A new Divine Service was instituted. The new Divine Service was not one that would look merely look forward, but also one that would look to the past and be done in remembrance of Him.

We could talk about what that means.

We could also talk about what the darkness and the earthquake mean. We could talk about how the prophets had predicted a day of judgment. They had predicted that God would come on a day of judgment. They predicted that God would make all of the injustices of the past right on the day of judgment. They predicted that the day of judgment would be a day of darkness and not light. They predicted that on the day of judgment the Lord would shake the earth.

And so when Jesus dies, the earth shakes. The rocks split. The sun goes dark. That is God telling you that the day of judgment has come. The day when God rights all wrongs had come. The day when all

of the previous injustices of the past find their justice had arrived. The day when the sin of the whole world would be judged and everyone would get what they deserved had come. It had come on a Friday long ago.

Sin did get its just punishment, but the sinners who committed those sins found themselves acquitted. After all they were not hanging under God's judgment for what they had done. Jesus was hanging under God's judgment for what they had done. They were forgiven. That was God's judgment. The eternal God spoke His eternal judgment and He did it a long time ago.

Oh yes, we could talk about judgment and what that means and how God renders judgment even when He forgives. We could talk about what that means.

We could also talk about the tombs that broke open when Jesus died.

The tombs of many holy people broke open when Jesus died. They rose from the dead. They appeared to many people in Jerusalem after Jesus Himself and risen from the dead. We could talk about what happened to these people. Since Moses and Isaiah are not still walking around now, we assume that they went back into their tombs to await the final resurrection at the Lord's return. So it is with those others whom Jesus raised from the dead.

But the fact that the tombs broke open at the moment when Jesus dies shows us that His death is what defeats death. We have already observed that our Lord's death forgives us of our sins. But the wages of sin is death. Therefore if we are forgiven, we will not die. And yet we observe every day that we die. If we die and yet God has taken away our sins and therefore the cause of death, then how is it that we live forever? We live forever by resurrection from the dead. We do not simply up and live forever. We do not live forever as a disembodied soul floating in heaven. We live forever as we have always lived, physically. The only difference is that at the resurrection that is coming we will rise and be perfect and pure and holy and unblemished and undying. This eternal life was obtained by Jesus when He died. His resurrection is a natural result of His own righteousness before God who reversed the sentence of Pontius Pilate upon Him and a result of death being defeated.

In order to demonstrate this to us God breaks open some preliminary tombs when Jesus dies and raises the dead people inside of them. He causes them to appear to people in the holy city so that we know that Jesus has defeated death and then those dead along with us return to wait for the final resurrection at the end of time.

We could talk about what it all means.

And we should talk about what it all means.

As with all good things, there is usually something bad that goes with them. The bad thing is that if we spend all of our time talking about what it all means, we may focus so much on what it meant that we lose sight of the fact that it happened.

Laypeople do not have as much trouble with this as pastors do. There are lots and lots of pastors who talk so much about what all of this mean that they have forgotten that it actually in fact happened. The curtain did spontaneously tear itself in two. The sky did go dark for three hours. There was an earthquake. The rocks did split. The holy ones of old did rise from the dead and appear to people in Jerusalem. You can always spot a pastor who has talked too much about what it means that he has lost sight of the fact that it happened. When somebody points out how it all really happened the pastor is embarrassed. And this can happen to you laypeople as well. You can become so involved in what it all means that when someone challenges you on whether or not it happened you are embarrassed to say that it did.

The sky did grow dark on the day that Jesus died. The sun went out for three hours. The rocks did split. The curtain did spontaneously tear itself in two. The dead did rise and appear to many in the holy city.

And the centurion and those with him saw it all. And even though they were Gentiles and had no temple of God's oracles of old to understand what was going on around them even they knew that something different and special was happening. They knew it so well that they exclaimed spontaneously at His death, "Truly, this man was the Son of God."

The point of witnesses like these is that it counts for you.

If someone goes on a journey and returns with a detailed account of what happened on their trip, then it was as good as if I had gone myself. If their description contains enough detail, if I were to go on the same trip, I would be able to find my way around even if I had never been there before. That is the advantage of having witnesses.

The centurion and his companions serve as witnesses to the death of Jesus. You and I were not at the death of Jesus. He and those with him were. They have given an account together with others as to what took place on that day. That account gives sufficient detail that it counts the same as if you had been there yourself. If you walked through a time warp like in *Outlander* and found yourself at the crucifixion of Jesus, you would recognize everything that is going on around you and you would be able to tell that it was the crucifixion of Jesus and not of someone else. It is like you were there.

And when God is the One who is backing the witnesses and sending them, it is as good as being there.

Which means that supernaturally speaking you have seen what the centurion and his companions saw.

You have the advantage of knowing the Old Testament in spite of the fact that you are Gentiles and so not only did you see what happened you also know what it means.

Therefore the centurion and his companions are not the only voices who say that this Man was the Son of God. Your voices says it also along with all of the other voices that have said it down through the ages and all of the voices who are to come who will also say it.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.