

Pastor T.C. Arnold
Good Friday
March 25th, 2016

Have you ever noticed how when people tell you directions, they tend to either use landmarks or science? The landmarkers are the ones who tell you what you “can’t miss.” “Just turn right at the big Walmart,” or the house with the white fence.” You can’t miss it. These are directions for the landmarkers. On the other hand, you have the scientists. Although they aren’t all this bad, sometimes you need a compass. “Just go north on Bradley 3 miles until you reach Hampton. Then go west, until you reach the 2100 block, and turn south there.” Using landmarks or science, either way people seek to give you directions. But what they don’t know is that how they give directions creates a certain kind of following. For the scientists, you need a compass and street signs and a numbering system. For the landmarkers, however, you only look to what is obvious and you clearly find your way.

In his Gospel, Luke has been rather scientific in his approach. As he tells us about Christ’s birth, he opens for us the world of kings and kingdoms. It was in the days of “*Caesar Augustus . . . while Quirinius was governor of Syria*” that “*all went to be registered, each to his own town.*” It is Luke who tells us approximately when Jesus began His ministry: it was around the time of John the Baptist, “*in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being the governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of Ituraea and Tracoonitis,*” and so on. Luke, in telling us about the beginning of Jesus’ ministry, has been scientific in his approach. This creates a certain kind of following.

But notice the difference tonight. When Luke moves to the crucifixion, he begins to use landmarks. He points to creation and to the temple. What he tells us touches the very foundation of life on this earth and eternal life with God. “*It was now about the sixth hour,*” he writes, “*and there darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour, while the sun’s light failed. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two*” (23:44–45). You don’t need a map of the Holy Land to know what is happening at the crucifixion. You don’t need to be able to tell the difference between a governor and a tetrarch. No, Luke uses what is obvious so that anybody in the world can see what is happening and all will believe in the graciousness of God.

Sometimes our life in faith is too scientific. I don’t mean that science is bad... what I mean is that we are apt to think that, “If I do this, God will do that. Because I have been a faithful Christian all my life, God will certainly not send this calamity my way. Since this terrible thing or that terrible thing (like another terrorist attack in yet another country) then God must have a low level of involvement in the matters of this life. I can prove it. The evidence is before us. God doesn’t care as much as you think He does.” And when this happens on our doorstep, in our homes discouragements come easily to a heart already weighed down with so much burden.

Perhaps you have come tonight tired of trying to get God to work in your life. You’ve followed all sorts of rules. Your bookshelf has one too many books on how to have a happy marriage and you’ve stopped saying your prayers anymore before bed. You are simply tired of the struggle . . . worn out by the complexity . . . and deep down afraid that maybe God isn’t there. Listen to Luke.

Luke speaks tonight for all who have ever been lost in a religious system. Whether it is the rules and regulations that we impose on our behavior, the Christian bookstore teachings, or the politics of churches. If you have ever been lost, listen to Luke. He points to something as important and central to your life today as the temple. He says, to understand what is happening at this crucifixion, think about worshiping where a huge curtain separates the people from their

God. When that temple curtain is ripped, you know something has happened. The way of worship has changed. God is no longer hidden from His people, needing to be reached by the blood of sacrifice. He does not need our religious activities, our efforts to find Him. He comes to us and forgives us by the death of His Son. Here is God's simple love: on the cross, He opens the door to eternal forgiveness. Through the sacrifice of His Son, God opens to you His heart. Jesus suffers the punishment of sin that you might receive the love of God.

Do you still need directions? Luke points to something as universal as creation. He says that to understand what is happening at this crucifixion, you simply need to have lived in a world where the sun rises in the morning and makes its way from one side of the sky to the other. When it is the middle of the day, between the sixth and ninth hours, when the sun is in the middle of the sky and that sun stops shining, you know something has happened. The way of the world has changed. The power of darkness has come close to Jesus and, for a moment, creation bows its head and closes its eyes. There is night like no other: when Jesus dies for a fallen creation. But then there will be a morning like no other: when Jesus rises and brings about a new creation and a never-ending age. Jesus comes to you this night, takes the wrath of God for you that you might awaken in a new creation. There, you will never faint or grow weary, for your God is alive. When Luke tells of the crucifixion of Jesus, he uses landmarks as important as worship and as universal as creation so that no one can miss the significance of this event.

And speaking of landmarks, there is another landmark we usually see on Good Friday at Christ Lutheran that we don't see this evening. For at least the past 8 years Pastor Krueger has preached on this most holy evening. A faithful pastor for many years who would point us to the same landmarks Luke does in the Gospel – and not just on Good Friday, but as our pastor for many, many years. Our faithful shepherd now realizes where all these landmarks have their eventual end... heaven.

We live in a world filled with complexity: It could be the changing emotions of your daughter, the aging of your mother, the changing job market, and the instability of your employment. In that complexity, it is easy for us to lose our focus. We try to balance our love for our children, our care for our parents, our love for our spouse, and our obligations at work. And in this midst of this, we don't find easy answers. It is never as simple as turning on the TV or picking up a book about Christian living. We struggle, we pray, we love truly, and we live sincerely. At times, we falter and lose our way. You don't need to know us long to see our sin and our failures. You don't need to be a genius to recognize our weakness. But, even when in our weakness we fall into sin, God remains a Savior bringing us salvation. As long as we live and as long as we struggle, there is one thing that does not change. You can point to my sin, but I can point to my Savior: Jesus. This one who died on the cross, He was a righteous man. And lest any should doubt, Luke has given all of the directions anyone would need. The heavens, the temple, and the people proclaim that here, tonight, on the cross is the glory of God. God has made this place, Golgotha, a place of praise. Tonight, God opens the kingdom of heaven. In Christ, He forgives you your sin. Take comfort in that certainty. Though our lives are complex, God has given us life in the death of His Son. For this simple saving love, we sing praise. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.