

May 8, 2011
Sermon for Third Sunday of Easter
St Peter Lutheran Church
Bowie, TX
Larry Knobloch, Pastor

J.J.- Jesu Juva—Help me, Jesus

Acts 2:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them: “Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words.

Acts 2:36-41 (ESV)

³⁶ Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.” ³⁷ Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” ³⁸ And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹ For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.” ⁴⁰ And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation.” ⁴¹ So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.

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¹ *The Holy Bible : English Standard Version*. Wheaton : Standard Bible Society, 2001

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Amen.

“You crucified your Savior!”

That’s pretty much what Peter says to the crowd wondering what all the fire and wind and commotion of Pentecost are about. Everything you’re seeing and hearing—it’s because of something you did...when you killed Jesus!

Maybe it makes us a bit squirmy hearing it put like that: “This Jesus whom you crucified.” We don’t want to be on the hook for something like that! I mean, we love Jesus! A lot! We would never want to hurt Him, much less kill Him. That can’t be us! So we pass by this text without letting it touch us.

We blame those first-century Jews for killing Jesus (with help from the godless Romans), and we shake our heads and assure ourselves it would have been oh-so-different had we lived back then. We’d never have done anything terrible to Jesus. We’d never give the Father reason to shed any tears over us! We’re Lutherans after all, for goodness’ sake!

How quickly we forget! Luther stood virtually alone among medieval theologians in not blaming the Jews for Jesus’ death. Rather, Luther put the blame squarely where it belongs—on himself, on you, and on me.

Who killed Jesus? I did! You did. We all did it. Admit it! Confess it! It’s true. What Peter said on the first Pentecost is spoken rightly to us all this morning: “God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified” (v 36).

Oh, and happy Mother's Day, by the way, huh? Not perhaps the most cheerful way to begin our reflection on a day of national goodwill toward mothers, I know; but that's one of the things your Mom probably taught you...to take responsibility for your actions.

This is the paradox of the Gospel. It is bad news before it is good news. It is tragic news before it is glad tidings of new life. And if we try to tone down the bad news by shifting the blame onto someone else for Jesus' death, then we begin to shift the beauty, the wonder, the forgiveness, the joy, and the life of the Gospel onto someone else.

It was Jesus himself who said of those who drove the nails into His hands and feet, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Lk 23:34). Not "Father, forgive everyone for this," but "Forgive them, the ones who are driving the nails and killing Me. Forgive My murderers their sin!"

Unless you are willing to take the rap and be in the company of the hardened sinners who killed Jesus, then you are putting yourself outside the sinners whom He justified by His blood.

Peter was telling them, and us, if you will not confess your crime, if you will not admit God has made Him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified, then you simply will not know the power of His forgiveness, because forgiveness of sin is what Peter proclaims to those who crucified Jesus.

So what about the ones who consider themselves not guilty of His death, not guilty of any bad sins? What about them? Well, the Gospel is simply not for them.

They are on their own, with their own righteousness to present to God at the Last Day. And good luck with that! Dr. Luther's colleague, Philip Melanchthon once wrote Luther a letter in which he agonized over a whole array of trifling little sins that he'd committed, unkind words he'd spoken to friends, laziness with his work, and an uncharitable attitude toward students. Luther wrote back a response in which he advised Master Philip that he ought to go out and commit a real crime, perhaps rob a bank or kill someone. Then he could quit worrying about trifling little sins and "join us in the company of real and hardened sinners who have had to flee for refuge entirely under the cross of Jesus Christ!" No word on what Melanchthon did with that letter!

But you, my friends, needn't worry about casing any banks this afternoon. You've already committed the most serious crime! You murdered the Lord of Life. You killed Jesus by hanging Him on a tree! Can't get any worse than that! And why do I say that you did it? Well, your fingerprints are all over the scene of the crime. The forensic evidence against you is overwhelming!

The crime report says our sins put Jesus on the cross ("He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world," 1 Jn 2:2). Now, you're a sinner, right?

It's Mother's day so just think about her for a minute...you haven't always been nice to your mom, have you? You haven't always cleaned up your room and helped in the kitchen and told her how much you love her, have you? Of course you haven't—otherwise we wouldn't need to have a day like Mother's Day to atone a little bit for all our sins against Mom during the rest of the year.

And that's what convicts you. Every day, in all kinds of little ways, you show yourself to be a sinner. And St. Peter and St. John agree—it was sinners, all sinners, who killed Jesus: “Know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified” (v 36). Your fingerprints are all over the cross. Maybe you have a blank spot in your memory about your sins, well, it doesn't acquit you! It just shows you've repressed those terrible things in your life. Maybe you didn't mean to betray the trust of your friend...maybe you didn't mean to cheat on your wife or any of the hundreds of sins you might commit. But fingerprints don't lie, and yours, my friends, and mine are all over the cross of Jesus.

Which is a good thing! Because the payback our Lord gives to His killers is eternal life, forgiveness of all sins, and a place in His kingdom of everlasting bliss and joy. Because that's the kind of Lord he is. That's the kind of love He has for the unlovely. The love of God does not find what is pleasing to Him but creates what is pleasing to Him by the Word of the cross.

God tricked us, you see. He put Jesus in our way, knowing we would kill Him, so that by His death, the Father could bring an end to our sin and dying. It was a setup. God set us up for salvation by the death of His Son and praise be to him that He did so.

Our first partners in crime that we read about in Acts this morning, when they heard this news and saw their fingerprints all over the cross, they did not excuse themselves. They were cut to the heart and cried out, “What shall we do?” (v 37). And Peter answers, the loveliest lines in Acts, “Repent and be

baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself” (vv 38–39).

He called you in your Baptism. He made you His own child and heir. By putting the blood of Jesus on our hands, he has washed all our sin away and given life and joy in place of our sin and death. A great exchange! So take the rap. Admit you did it. Because God has made Him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified, so that in him you would be sons and daughters of God, holy and righteous by his blood. Get it? Peter points the finger at you,

Peter Implicates You in Jesus’ Death...

in Order to Share Jesus’ Life with You.

Amen.

“And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Phil 4:7).

Amen.