

# Saint Timothy Lutheran – Edmonds, WA

Midweek Lenten Service II – February 24, 2010

Rev. Craig A. Patterson (Based upon the Sermon Series, “Words of Life From the Cross,” CPH, 2010)

## “The Promising Word”

(Text: Luke 23:39-43)

**Context:** Jesus was led to the edge of the city, to a place called Golgatha (the place of the skull). At Golgatha, they nailed Jesus to a cross and hung him there to die. He was crucified along side of two other criminals, one on His left and one on His right. The words of these two criminals and the response of our Lord Jesus teach us so very much about how an unbelieving sinner faces death in contrast to how a believer is enabled to face his/her death. What a difference there is!

### I. The First Thief Prayed a Prayer of Derision And Demand.

- A. The unbelieving criminal had no respect toward God.
  - 1. This thief's prayer was one of mockery, “Save Yourself and us!”
    - a. This was not a prayer of faith, but of derision. (Like the devil's mocking attempts to tempt, “If You are the Son of God..., If You are the Christ...”)
    - b. ‘What kind of Christ are you? What sort of Messiah are you going to be? Flex some of that messianic muscle and save Yourself and us too. Or are You a fake, an imposter, a phony Christ? Spare Yourself from this death, and spare us too?’ he could have added.
- B. This unbelieving thief could be the spokesman for the unbelieving world.
  - 1. His unbelieving prayer comes in the form of a demand, not a humble “Kyrie” (Lord, have mercy.).
  - 2. This desparate criminal demanded help from Jesus, if, indeed, He could prove that He was the real thing. (Irreverence is displayed here as well.)
  - 3. Have you heard such prayers by suffering unbelievers?
  - 4. Have you been tempted to pray such a prayer yourself?

### II. The Second Thief Prayed A Prayer Of Humble, Repentant, Faith.

- A. The thief on the right rebukes his fellow thief, “Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?”
  - 1. This thief had a clear sense of right and wrong. He knew his own sin full well.
  - 2. “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom,” wrote Solomon.
    - a. To fear the LORD is to put all other fears in their place.
    - b. Luther wrote, “We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things,” certainly in life and especially at our life's end, when we, too, find ourselves under the same death sentence of the Law.
    - c. To fear the LORD under those circumstances is to be wise in the way of faith, trusting that in life and in death, Jesus is mighty to save.
- B. The thief on Jesus' right hand expresses his repentant attitude.
  - 1. He confessed his sin, “And we indeed (are condemned) justly, for we are receiving the due rewards of our deeds” (Luke 23:41).
  - 2. “The wages of sin is death,” wrote Paul (Romans 6:23).
  - 3. This thief, however, recognizes his sin and confesses it.
- C. This thief addresses Jesus tenderly and directly as he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into Your kingdom” (Luke 23:42).

### III. The Response Of Jesus To The Repentant Thief Brings Life To A Dying Soul.

- A. “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43).
  - 1. No less than “paradise” is promised to this lowly sinner.
  - 2. Today, right away, as the repentant thief's body weakens and dies, Jesus promises “paradise.”
- B. Just as the repentant thief is totally unable to rescue himself, we, too, are unable to rescue ourselves.
  - 1. Yet, Jesus speaks these same words to us, who by God's grace, are repentant and believing.
  - 2. At the moment of our death (or when the Lord returns to judge the world), we will experience the truth of Jesus' words, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.”