

TFTD 25.39 Good Friday April 18th

Women of Jerusalem: Luke 23.13-43



Reading Luke's account of the crucifixion we wonder why certain things that are included by the other Gospel writers are omitted in Luke, why certain things are included in Luke that we do not read elsewhere and where the emphasis shifts because of these omissions and inclusions. And why do the Gospel accounts have different emphases? We wonder whether one account is the most accurate or correct. And whether this account is the one that best explains what is happening at the crucifixion of Christ.

The way I have come to think of it is that many things are happening at the crucifixion. If we think of the crucifixion as the pivotal moment in human history, we must not be surprised if there is more than one thing happening at once.

What Luke omits, it seems to me, is a detailed account of how the Roman soldiers tortured Jesus before he was led away to be crucified. What he includes is the brief conversation Jesus had with the women of Jerusalem as he was led away to the place of the Skull.

Why does Luke include this conversation that the other Gospel writers omit? We can often count on Luke to include a female perspective on events. Maybe Luke sees significance in this conversation with women that other Gospel writers overlooked. Jesus says to the women who weep for him, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children" (Luke 23:28)

Is he saying that this suffering of mine that you are witnessing is no different from the suffering that is in your future and in your children's future? And, if so, why did he say this? Is he saying that the way I respond to my suffering is the way God calls on you to respond to your suffering?

Maybe this is why Luke is so keen for the emphasis in his account of the trial of Jesus to be on his innocence. Pilate says to Jesus' accusers, "I have examined him in your presence and have not found this man guilty of any of your charges against him". (Luke 23: 14) and this point is picked up by the so-called penitent thief who is crucified next to Jesus and says, "We are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong." (Luke 23:41). And then when Jesus died, the centurion in command of the execution party proclaims, "Certainly this man was innocent." (Luke 23: 47). In Mark's Gospel, the centurion also speaks but he says something different. He says, "Truly, this man was God's Son." (Mark 15: 39)

Luke's Jesus is innocent. His execution is unjustified. It is illegal. His suffering is not deserved. And neither will the suffering of the women of Jerusalem and their children be deserved. And neither is the suffering of millions of innocent people in the world today.

The innocent Son of Man is crucified on the cross just as millions of innocent people suffer and die. And what does the Son of Man in Luke's Gospel say? "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do."

The challenge this presents us is truly enormous. We may ask ourselves whether we are innocent. We may ask ourselves how we have behaved when we have suffered or how we would behave if we were suffering. And we may ask ourselves how close we could come to the model of peaceful acceptance of suffering and even forgiveness which Jesus demonstrates on the cross.

Robin

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you:

Because by your holy Cross you have redeemed the world.



Luke 23.13-38

The Crucifixion of Jesus

As they led him away, they seized a man, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming from the country, and they laid the cross on him, and made him carry it behind Jesus. A great number of the people followed him, and among them were women who were beating their breasts and wailing for him. But Jesus turned to them and said, 'Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For the days are surely coming when they will say, "Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never nursed." Then they will begin to say to the mountains, "Fall on us"; and to the hills, "Cover us." For if they do this when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?'

Two others also, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. Then Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.' And they cast lots to divide his clothing. And the people stood by, watching; but the leaders scoffed at him, saying, 'He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!' The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine, and saying, 'If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!' There was also an inscription over him, 'This is the King of the Jews.'

One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, 'Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!' But the other rebuked him, saying, 'Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong.' Then he said, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.' He replied, 'Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.'

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