"Out of the Depths" -- Psalm 130

Funeral Sermon for Charles Skoro

2 April Anno Domini 1999
Good Friday
Our Redeemer Lutheran Church
Emmett, Idaho
Pastor Michael L. McCoy

O Lord, our Creator, Redeemer and Comforter, as we come together to hear Your Word, we humbly pray that You may open our hearts to the preaching of Your Word, so that we may repent of our sins and believe in Jesus Christ as our only Savior. Hear us for His sake. Amen.

Dear members of Charles Skoro's church family: Grace, mercy and peace to you in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

On this Good Friday when we have gathered here on this holy night which focuses on the death of Jesus Christ, the Son of God and the Son of Man, I confess that it seemed at first, awkward, uncomfortable and even wrong to speak of Charlie's death. However, since the death of our Lord has meaning for the entire life of the Christian, including and especially the time of his or her death, then I believe it appropriate to speak of these two deaths separated by nearly two thousand years. For death to be something other than a tragedy, we must hear of and know what Jesus' death has accomplished.

As you know, every Christian sermon tells us what the Lord God has done for us. As a Christian pastor, I am determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified (1 Corinthians 2:2). If a pastor is not permitted to speak of sin and grace, of Law and Gospel, of Christ crucified and risen, then he has no business officiating or preaching. As you are well aware, it is for this very reason that this sermon is being delivered to you this evening, instead of a week ago at Charlie's funeral service.

Therefore, permit me, on the basis of Psalm 130 to tell you what the Lord God has done for Charles, for you, for me and for all of mankind. Please listen to the sermon text under the theme ...

... Out of the Depths

Out of the depths I cry to Thee, O Lord!
Lord, hear my voice!
Let Thy ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications!
If Thou, O Lord, shouldst mark iniquities,
Lord, who could stand?
But there is forgiveness with Thee,
that Thou mayest be feared.
I wait for the Lord, my soul waits,
and in His Word I hope;

my soul waits for the Lord more
than watchmen for the morning,
more than watchmen for the morning.
O Israel, hope in the Lord!
For with the Lord there is steadfast love,
and with Him is plenteous redemption.
And He will redeem Israel from all His iniquities.

Thus far the Word of the Lord our God.

The psalmist begins at the place where a man's life is being overwhelmed, inundated and flooded. We might imagine being in a small boat on the ocean when a hurricane strikes and the waves consume the craft in an instant. One minute you are safe inside the boat, and the next moment you are swept away. While drowning is not a particularly pleasant death, it is quick. You didn't have a whole lot of time to ponder death.

But imagine a consuming death that takes a long time as your stranded boat slowly submerges over the period of years. The waterline begins at the ankles and proceeds slowly to the knees. After a year it comes to be waist deep, then slowly rises to chest high. Then water level creeps up to the neck. Any higher and the mouth will have to be closed. As long as one's nose is in the air one may remain alive. So there we are, at the point of physical death; and being there, what does one say to God?

That's what it must have been like for Charlie in the last five years of his life -- only instead of it being water that rose up to overwhelm him, it was Parkinson's Disease. It began with him not being able to have full use of his feet as he shuffled into the Divine Services here and those prophetic tremors in his hands foretold a long struggle. His disease proceeded slowly to his knees and one day a wheelchair was required. It got into his chest and a weak voice resulted ... one so weak that most of the time you could not make out what he was saying. He could not engage in a conversation as he once had done. That was frustrating for everyone involved, but especially for Charlie because he lived with his condition all the time.

During one visit when he was not able to speak and be understood, I told him that, no matter what, he could always talk to God with the thoughts and prayers in his mind. I told him that the Lord heard his silent prayers and his cries for help, and that the Lord would never leave him nor forsake him. Indeed, dear children of God, here was a man with a sharp mind trapped in a slowly failing body. Truly Charles Skoro knew what the psalmist meant in the first verse of Psalm 130 -- *Out of the depths I cry to Thee, O Lord! O Lord, hear my voice! Let Thy ears be attentive to the voice of my supplication!*

But this verse, and indeed, this psalm is not primarily about slowly drowning in the depths of the sea or gradually being overcome with the awful effects of a consuming disease. The condition this psalm addresses is a spiritual one and deals with a soul being overwhelmed with sin. *If Thou, O Lord, shouldst mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand?*

"If You, O God, should keep a list of all the sins that are charged to me, how could I stand? If You marked off not only the sins I do, but the things I don't do that I should have (like coming to church to hear the Word of God's love for me) ... if You kept track, not only of the transgressions of my mouth concerning what I said that were sins (like cursing, taking God's Name in vain or lying), but

also those times when You required me to speak and I kept quiet (like not praying or not confessing my sin or not confessing the Creed) ... if You marked the iniquities and sins of my heart (like lustful thoughts and scheming plans, like angry thoughts at a pastor who is telling me of my sin and who is trying to tell me about my Savior), O dear God, if you kept track of all these things, could I stand?"

The answer is a firm, "No!" No one could stand. I couldn't. You couldn't. Charlie couldn't. We are all sinners and deserve to be consumed, inundated, overwhelmed and drowned in the depths of the Lake of Fire.

But listen to the Good News of God in Christ. It is not the desire of the Lord God that anyone be burdened with his or her sins. The Lord has laid all our iniquities upon His Son. The Church's primary mission and the pastor's great privilege is to tell the Good News of God's Word ... to declare not only the sin which condemns but also and especially to proclaim the Savior and His forgiveness that He earnestly desires to be yours. *If Thou, O Lord, shouldst mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with Thee, that Thou mayest be feared.*

Dear people, behold Jesus the Son of God. He takes the guilt, the shame and the punishment of all your sins -- ones of thoughts, words and deeds and proceeds to the cross. Here He pays the eternal price for them as the wrath of God is released upon Jesus instead of on you. The shed Blood of the Son of God cries out for your pardon and you hear His Word from the cross, *Father, forgive them for they know not what they do*. The broken Body of Jesus the Christ hangs on the cursed tree and out of the depths of hell He says, *I thirst.* Betrayed and denied and crucified by man, and assaulted and tortured by the forces of evil and abandoned by the Father, Jesus cries out, *Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani? My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?* Out of the depths Jesus cried and His question of "Why?" was answered with silence from God.

Here, dear people, is what your sins cost Jesus. Here also is what your salvation is worth to Him. *Behold Jesus, Who for the joy that set was set before Him, endured the cross (Hebrews 12:2).* What a blessed privilege for me to proclaim to you and for us to confess and pray, *But there is forgiveness with Thee, that Thou mayest be feared.* So here we are, at the point of eternal, spiritual and physical death; and being here, what does one say to God? *Out of the depths I cry to Thee, O Lord! Lord, hear my voice! Let Thy ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications! If Thou, O Lord, shouldst mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand?*

And God sends His Word and His messengers to proclaim it. Dear Christian, please know that you may say unto the Almighty, *there is forgiveness with Thee, that Thou mayest be feared.* When the declaration of sin forgiven and guilt removed is made, your souls are clean and the robe of Christ's perfect righteousness is yours. Jesus announced the completed atonement and sufficient sacrifice that He worked and that He made when He said, *It is finished!* And to those like Charles and you, who know the Savior, who assent to His sin-atoning death, and who trust in Him, the message of *It is finished* becomes effective to you and is, "It is yours!"

So Charlie, with his soul healed and cleansed, and with his body continuing to deteriorate, waited for the Lord doing so *more than watchmen for the morning*, yes indeed, *more than watchmen for the morning.* At all times, but especially at such times, the Christian's hope is in God and *in His Word.* The Word of God's promises in Christ are what will sustain with the hope that does not disappoint the Christian. The psalmist says to the Church, *O Israel, hope in the Lord*. Jesus looks down from above the Place of the Skull and beholds His Church gathered on Good Friday. He gives His Church

His Word and commends the members to care for one another. *Woman, behold thy son. Behold thy mother.*

Two points of application are appropriate for the little flock here at Our Redeemer. One is completed; the other remains an opportunity. First concerning Charlie. When he was no longer able to come to these services to hear and hope in the Word, the Church came to him both in the video-taping of the services, with your visits with him, and with the ministry of the Word. Several times in the last couple weeks, *out of the depths* of his deathbed, when only his hearing was intact, Charlie heard the liturgy of the Church ... the Invocation, the Confession of Sin, the Absolution, the 23rd Psalm, the Apostles' Creed, the Lord's Prayer, the Nunc Dimittis, and the Benediction.

Second is an application concerning his wife, Lela. Dear people, there is no reason why Lela could not be brought to the Divine services here at Our Redeemer every Sunday. If you would be willing to pick her up and take her back to the assisted living home here in Emmett, please speak with me.

When you get right down to the basics in this life and when the going gets tough, a person will go one of two ways ... they will depart as Judas did, or they will remain faithful as John did. As we have journeyed through Lent with Jesus, we became painfully aware of those who have left the Lord and abandoned His Church. As we are aware in more recent days, such defection and departure still continues.

Dear Christian, the strength to remain faithful unto death is the strength that the Lord gives through His Word and Sacraments. *For with the Lord there is steadfast love, and with Him is plenteous redemption. And He will redeem Israel from all his iniquities.*

And then, just as the repentant thief petitioned God and heard Jesus speak the Promise of salvation from the cross on that first Good Friday and departed this life to be with the Lord, so also, on March 23rd of this year, Charlie became the beneficiary of the Promise, *Truly I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.*

At the ninth hour on Good Friday we hear Jesus speak from the cross for the final time. *Out of the depths* of darkness, the Light of the world is revealed and glorified. *Out of the depths* of dehydration, the Living Water pours Himself out for the sins of the world. *Out of the depths* of pain, the True Manna come down from heaven is broken for mankind. *Out of the depths* of hell, the conquering King, now nearly dead, has spent Himself for all people. *Out of the depths* of the Sufficient Sacrifice, the Son of God speaks to the One Who sent Him, *Father, into Thy hands I commit My Spirit! And having said this, He breathed His last.*