"At the Ninth Hour" -- Matthew 27:50-54

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church
Emmett, Idaho
21 April Anno Domini 2000
Good Friday
Pastor Michael L. McCoy

Dear Baptized,

The crucifixion of God Incarnate is so awfully incongruous, so terribly inharmonic, so dreadfully inconsistent that this earth and indeed, the solar system bear witness during the scandalous occasion. The Creator had entered His creation some thirty years earlier and is now crucified by His creatures. God forsakes Himself and the sun's light is extinguished as darkness covers all the land for three hours - until 3:00pm - until the ninth hour.

If that is what transpires when Jesus, the Son of God and the Son of Man, is crucified, what happens at the awe-filled moment of His death ... when He commends His spirit into the hands of His Father ... when Jesus' body and spirit separate? Please listen to the Good News written in the Gospel of Matthew 27:50-54 under the theme ...

... At the Ninth Hour

Jesus, when He had cried out again with a loud voice, yielded up His spirit. And behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth quaked, and the rocks were split, and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints were raised; and coming out of the graves after His resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many. Now when the centurion and those with him, who were guarding Jesus, saw the earthquake and the things that had happened, they feared greatly, saying, "Truly this was the Son of God!"

Thus far the Word of the Lord our God.

At the beginning of the crucifixion, when the Romans spikes had pinned the Jewish Savior to the cross, Jesus petitioned His Father on behalf of anyone and everyone - He interceded for all those who were responsible for His death, *Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do (Luke 23:34).* At the end of the crucifixion, in the darkness of that afternoon, Jesus knew and saw that all things had been accomplished (John 19:28). The atonement for the sins of the world was complete before the moment of Jesus' death. The Incarnate and forsaken Son of God had paid the Divine price for your sinful nature and had bore the hellish consequences of all your sins of thought, word and deed when He declared, *It is finished! (John 19:30).*

So what happened at the moment of Christ's death, at the instant He died? We pick up with our text for this Good Friday: *Jesus, when He had cried out again with a loud voice, yielded up His Spirit.* This High Priest Who began with the petition to His Father for our forgiveness ends His Sacrifice entrusting Himself to the same; *Father, into Thy hands I commend My Spirit (Luke 23:46).*

At the instant when Jesus' Body and Spirit separated, He died. His Body hung on the cross. His Spirit, that is Jesus Himself, returned to His Father. The Son of God returned to the glory of heaven that was His before the foundation of the world (John 17:5). Dearly beloved of God, listen to this Good News. At the ninth hour, at 3:00pm on that Friday, Jesus was in Paradise where He awaited the penitent thief to whom the crucified King of kings and Lord of lords had said, *Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise (Luke 23:43).*

Jesus *entered the Holy of Holies once for all (Hebrews 9:12) to appear in the presence of God for us (Hebrews 9:24).* At that moment of Jesus' death, when He placed Himself into His Father's hands, those same hands reached down from heaven above and grabbed the veil of the Sanctuary that hung in the temple - the curtain that stood in the way, preventing access to the Holy of Holies. *And behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.* Jesus' mouth is silent on the cross but the Lord God continues to reveal the Word with the tearing of the veil and the pulling back of the curtain.

While this miraculous tearing of the veil must have terrified those who were in the temple, what a revelation of the Gospel this is for God's people. This *message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God (1 Cor. 1:18).*

Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the Blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, and having a High Priest over the House of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water (Hebrews 10:19-22).

The death of the Son of God and Son of Man was of such a magnitude that the hand of God shook the earth in Divine judgment. The separation of Jesus' Spirit and Body - the most awful event in the history of history - was accompanied by a heaving of the land. God the Father, Who had forsaken His only-begotten Son until all was finished ... until all these things had been accomplished ... heard the prayer of His Son and was with Him at the moment of death, receiving Him into His hands. *And the earth quaked, and the rocks were split.* This presence of God caused the earth to quake and the rocks to split. Thus do the enemies of God tremble in servile fear at this visitation of the Judge. Thus do the children of the Lord tremble in godly fear in the wake of Jesus being taken into Paradise by His Father.

Dearly beloved, listen to this Good News. By the grace of God through faith in Christ, you are in the mighty, gracious, holy, merciful hands of God. Indeed, the Lord Jesus declares, *No one is able to snatch* you *out of My Father's hand (John 10:29).* And just as Jesus entered into Paradise at the moment of His death, and just as the penitent thief entered into Paradise that same day at the moment of His death, so also you live in and with the promise that He will never drop you ... never leave you nor forsake you. With full assurance, you are able to pray each day and every night the equivalent of Jesus' declaration, *Father, into Thy hands I commend My Spirit (Luke 23:46)*, when you pray: "Into Thy hands I commend myself; my body and soul and all things", and know that He continues to do this.

Jesus, when He had cried out again with a loud voice, yielded up His Spirit. The death of Jesus prompted a miraculous and wonderful resurrection. *And behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth quaked, and the rocks were split, and the graves were opened;*

and many bodies of the saints were raised; and coming out of the graves after His Resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many.

At first, this event may seem bizarre or out of place. It isn't. At the moment of the Messiah's death, the tombs were opened and many of those people who had fallen asleep in the Lord ... who were holy because they believed and trusted in the Lord God ... who were (as you are) saved by the grace of God through faith in the promised Christ ... who in reality, are saints (as you are), were raised from the dead. In the reversal of death, their bodies and souls were re-united. After the Sabbath Day's rest and following the Easter Resurrection of Jesus, these holy people came out of the graves and went into the holy city of Jerusalem where they appeared to many people.

What we have in this miracle is a certain picture of the wonderful future that awaits the faithful. Dearly beloved, listen to the Good News: Because of the atoning sacrifice of the Son of God, as well as His Resurrection, there will come a Day when Jesus will raise all the dead and will call His own forth from their graves. In the reversal of death, He will re-unite your body (which will be glorious) with your soul (which is declared perfect and will be perfect). He will summon you saints, you holy ones from the cemeteries of the world, will declare *Follow Me* and will lead you into the holy city.

We will be able to join the apostle whom Jesus loved and bear witness, *Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying; and there shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away (Revelation 21:2-4).*

Perhaps you are wondering why, if all these wonderful miracles took place at the moment of Jesus' death, when His Spirit went into His Father's hands and into Paradise, ... why this day and this service end with such solemnity and sorrow, with such reflection and sadness?

Permit me to take you back. The Apostle John continued in his description of the holy city, New Jerusalem: *But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. And the city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it, and the Lamb is its light (21:22-23). And the city had no need of the sun.*

On that Friday from twelve noon until three in the afternoon, Old Jerusalem needed the sun. Golgotha was without light. Calvary was dark. At the ninth hour ... at 3:00pm ... at the death of Jesus, the veil was torn, the earth quaked, the rocks split and many bodies of the saints were raised. One more thing happened. The sun began to shine over the city and the crucifixion site once more. What did the centurion and the soldiers see? *Now when the centurion and those with him, who were guarding Jesus, saw the earthquake and the things that had happened, they feared greatly, saying, "Truly this was the Son of God!"* Of the centurion alone it is written that when he *saw what had happened, he glorified God, saying, "Certainly this was a righteous Man!" (Luke 24:47).*

There was light where the Apostle John stood. And what did Mother Mary and Aunt Salome see clearly in the sunlight of this day? What did Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene behold when the light shone brightly? They saw the same thing you see when a loved one departs this world; you see the body that is left. There is grief and sorrow, pain and tears. Consider what the

Church saw as she congregated *to that sight, seeing what had been done (Luke 23:48).* The Church viewed the Body of her Lord hanging on the accursed cross. Is it any wonder that the congregation is stunned and shocked when the sunlight revealed the death of Jesus on the cross. The bloody forehead has puncture wounds from the crown of thorns. The back has been practically flayed because of the scourging. The head and shoulders bear the wounds from the beating with a stick. The hair and face wear the spittle of man. The hands and feet have puncture wounds. The arms are streaked with blood. The body is baptized in sweat. Can it get any worse for those faithful at the cross of the Lord Jesus? Yes it can and yes it does. You might wonder what more could be done.

At the ninth hour, as John and the women stood watching with red, tearful eyes, one of soldiers dutifully approached Jesus and *pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out (John 19:34)* - water as is used in Baptism - the very Blood of the Holy Communion - all pouring forth from the Body of Jesus given into death for you.

Ye who think of sin but lightly
Nor suppose the evil great
Here may view its nature rightly,
Here its guilt may estimate.
Mark the Sacrifice appointed,
See Who bears the awful load;
'Tis the Word, the Lord's Anointed,
Son of Man and Son of God. Amen.
(TLH # 153, stanza 3)