

First Presbyterian Church
Marianna, Florida
Sunday, March 25, 2012
Sermon by Huw Christopher, Pastor

Scripture Readings: Mark 10:32-40

John 19:28-29

Sermon Title: “The Glory of God in the Words of Jesus from the Cross: ‘I am Thirsty’”

Sermon Text: John 19:28: After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfill the scripture), “I am thirsty.”

“I am thirsty.” Of all the sayings of Jesus from the cross this is probably the one with which we can identify most easily. The fact that we are here this morning alive means, of course, that none of us have known what it is like Jesus to die the cruel death of a cross. Yet I am sure that most, if not all, of us have known what it is at some point in our lives to say like him, “I am thirsty.” His experience of losing blood and sweat as he suffered the beatings, wore the crown of thorns, carried the cross and then was hung on it out below the morning sun may be unique as it probably led him to the point of dehydration. Many, though, who have watched with loved ones or with patients as they have been dying know that frequently some of their last words can be, “I am thirsty.”

“I am thirsty.” In these words more than any other we are confronted with the truth of the Christian faith that we proclaim that in Jesus Christ the Word of God became flesh and dwelt among us. In the affirming the incarnation of Jesus we

are affirming that Jesus knew what it was to experience the fullness of our human experience including what it was to be thirsty. These words from the cross remind us that when we accept the invitation of our anthem to survey the wondrous cross we are confronted with the reality of that love so amazing and so divine of the One who was willing to come to share life with us here on earth with all of its dangers and temptations, who was to experience the rejection of God's love and God's ways that he sought to display in word and in deed, and who was willing even to suffer in this cruel and inhuman way to show us how much God loves us. Our introit through Lent has reminded us of why he came and why he suffered,

For me, dear Jesus, was Your incarnation,
Your mortal sorrow, and Your life's oblation,
Your death of anguish and Your bitter passion, for my salvation.

"I am thirsty" The words of Jesus from the cross prompt us all to marvel at the wondrous love that has been shown for each one of us through his life here on earth, and especially through his unjust suffering and cruel death.

In our first lesson we heard Jesus make clear to those who were following him that his suffering and his death did not come as a surprise to him. He set his face to go to Jerusalem even though he anticipated that suffering and death would face him there. As we think about the choice he made we can see why Mark could say that those who were going with him were amazed, no doubt that he would be making such a choice. He also says that they were afraid, no doubt as they wondered what was going to happen to them as well if they continued to follow him to Jerusalem. In the midst of this discussion on the journey to Jerusalem the request of John and James seems so strange. Jesus has spoken of defeat, of suffering and of death but John and James come asking for special places when he comes into his glory. Had they heard more and understood more than most of his followers about what he meant when he said, "after three days he will rise again."?

We may not know what they anticipated his glory would be but clearly they want the best seats in the house and the places of honor to sit on his right hand and on his left. Jesus makes clear that they do not understand the nature of their request as he says, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? What Jesus makes clear to them is what entering into glory will mean for Jesus and how this also was going to be the way to share in his glory themselves.

His words from the cross, “I am thirsty,” remind us of what it meant for Jesus to drink the cup of suffering and to live out the commitment of his baptism to live as the Son of God, doing the will of God in his own life. John and James affirm that they are able to drink of the cup of which Jesus drank and to be baptized with the same baptism. How much they understood of what they are affirming we cannot be sure. Their words remind us, though, that as we remember our own baptisms and what it means to us to live as those who bear Christ’s name we cannot be absolutely certain what it may involve for us. Which one of us can say that at the time of our baptism we understood all that it would come to mean in our lives to live as a follower of Jesus Christ? Even today how many of can say what being a Christian, a member of this church, will mean to us in the future? One thing we can know for sure is that we cannot bear the name of Christ and reflect the glory of God that he showed forth if we are not ready in love to be willing to suffer and, if necessary, even to die for others. As we think today about the future of this congregation the words of Jesus Christ, the Head of the Church, remind us that this congregation will reflect the glory of God of which we love to sing only as we remember that we are part of the Church of Jesus Christ who drank of that cup of suffering, and who calls all people to drink of this cup, and to be baptized with the baptism with which he was baptized that led eventually to his suffering and his death on the cross.

“I am thirsty.” It is interesting that John alone of the Gospel records these words of Jesus from the cross. It is also John alone who records the conversation of Jesus with the woman at the well in Samaria where earlier he had also spoken of being thirsty and in need of a drink. This request had led to his conversation with that woman in which he had said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.” (John 4:13-14). How ironic that the one who had offered that gift of living water should now cry out, “I am thirsty.” His cry and his earlier words highlight that like us he had both those physical and spiritual thirsts. As he cries out, “I am thirsty” as some of his last words before he dies on the cross he is highlighting the way in which human beings have chosen to react to God’s gift of living water leading to eternal life that he has sought to bring to them. By trying to get rid of him they were saying, “We prefer our broken cisterns and our wells of murky, stagnant water. Such unclean, static water allows us to decide what we want to do, and how we want to be treated and how we want to treat other people. We do not want that living water of eternal life which will enable us to drink the cup of suffering that Jesus was drinking, and to be baptized with the baptism with which he was baptized.” The reaction of the people to God’s gift of living water in Jesus Christ as they hung him on a cross to suffer so much that he had to cry out, “I am thirsty,” challenges us to think what are we doing with God’s gift of living water for eternal life in Jesus Christ? The fact that the words of Jesus that after three days he would rise again became a reality reminds us that the gift of living water for eternal life that Jesus came to bring to this world was not just for that woman at the well in Samaria but is for all who are ready to receive it. This is still the gift that Jesus wants to give to all people so that they might come to see that they are not being asked to drink the cup of suffering love that he drank in their

own strength, and that they are not being asked to live out their baptism as those who bear the name of Christ on their own. The gift of Jesus Christ the Head of the Church is still to give that gift of living water so that even when we become physically thirsty from giving ourselves in loving service to other people in his name we can still find that source of strength and power through his gift of God's living waters that lead to that eternal and abundant life God wants all people to know and to experience.

Today as we look to the future of this congregation and to our own personal futures as those who seek to live out our baptisms as those who bear the name of Christ we can do so in the assurance that Jesus Christ, the Head of the Church, is still offering to us his living water to sustain and to strengthen us as individuals, and as a congregation of his people, that we may know that fullness of life, that eternal life God desires for us.

The hymn of Bernard of Clairvaux, who lived from 1091-1153, reminds us of the way in which as we claim God's gift of living water for eternal life offered by Jesus who knew what it was to say, "I am thirsty," we are entering into a long tradition of people who have known that they can drink of the cup of suffering love, and live out their baptisms as those who bear Christ's name only with his power and strength that comes through a loving, joyful relationship with him. Let us claim again this gift of our living Lord as we sing the hymn of Bernard of Clairvaux, "Jesus, Thou Joy of Loving Hearts," found at hymn No. 510.

Jesus, Thou Joy of Loving Hearts

510

Attr. Bernard of Clairvaux (1091–1153)
Trans. Ray Palmer, 1858; alt.

QUEBEC LM

Henry Baker, 1854

1. Je - sus, Thou joy of lov - ing hearts, Thou fount of
 2. Thy truth un - changed hath ev - er stood; Thou sav - est
 3. We taste Thee, O Thou liv - ing bread, And long to
 4. Our rest - less spir - its yearn for Thee, Wher-e'er our

life, Thou light of all, From the best bliss that
 those that on Thee call; To them that seek Thee
 feast up - on Thee still; We drink of Thee, the
 change - ful lot is cast, Glad when Thy gra - cious

earth im - parts We turn, un - filled, to heed Thy call.
 Thou art good, To them that find Thee, all in all.
 foun - tain - head, And thirst our souls from Thee to fill.
 smile we see, Blest when our faith can hold Thee fast.

5. O Jesus, ever with us stay,
 Make all our moments calm and bright;

O chase the night of sin away,
 Shed o'er the world Thy holy light.

Alternate tune: JESU DULCIS MEMORIA, 511