

## **“A Royal Reversal”**

**Luke 1: 67-79; Luke 23: 32-43**

**November 25, 2007**

### **Background:**

- We've just heard in our 1<sup>st</sup> reading of Zechariah's prophecy. Zechariah was John the Baptist's father—he foretold the coming of a mighty savior who would save the people of Israel from their enemies.
- Now we move ahead to Luke chapter 23. Jesus has been born to us, he has lived as a carpenter, ministered for 3 years, and is being put to death.
- Jesus has gone to the place of the “Skull”. In Aramaic it's Golgatha; in Latin--Calvary
- So we turn to that Mighty Savior, Jesus, on the cross between 2 criminals.

**Read Text: This is the Word of the Lord...**

### **Pray**

### **Message**

I remember the Thanksgiving Day, even though it was several years ago. It was one of the first that I had cooked. You know the trick of the dinner isn't that the cooking is so hard—it's timing—getting everything done and serving it hot at the same time. So we had just served the soup—Clam Chowder, this is one of my husband's traditions from his east coast upbringing. And then it happened. CRASH! And the chowder was all over our son, Philip and all over the table cloth, and all over the carpet. I don't know how one bowl turned upside down could have had so much in it. Anyway, we sent Philly up to his room to change and we tried to clean up the carpet so the seafood and milk didn't smell and seep into the carpet. After a bit we heard another CRASH! I looked at Scott and said “I'll go!” As I opened Phil's bedroom door I saw a disaster—not just clothes and toys—the usual disaster, but shattered glass and pebbles and Philly is holding part of the tail of the lizard that he had been pet-sitting. He was trying to catch both of the lizards that were now scrambling around the room chasing their food. Do you know what lizards eat? Crickets! Which of course we had just re-

supplied so there's glass, and pebbles, and lizards, and crickets. I yelled, "Scott" and when Scott arrived Philly explained that he "just wanted to look at them." He had been trying to reach into the aquarium on top of his dresser and had accidentally knocked it off and that's how it had gotten turned upside down and shattered and with that our nice quiet relaxing dinner had been turned upside down as well.

Our plans—our vision for how things will be can be turned upside down. Zechariah had a vision for the people of Israel—a vision for the Messiah as a mighty Savior who would save the people from their enemies and from the hand of all who hate them. The people of Israel then had to reconcile their understanding of the Messiah—of the Most High—being lifted up onto a cross. Crucifixion was used by the Roman government as a public warning to those who might challenge their authority. It was a particularly shameful, painful, and slow way to die. Scholars call this the scandal of the cross. That Jesus, the Chosen One of God, should be mocked, suffer and die.

But Jesus was named even as others attempted to shame him. He is shamed and named 3 times. First, the religious leaders scoff at him. They acknowledge that he had saved others—so their test for being the Messiah is if he could save himself. The true Messiah, in their eyes would never die on a cross. Notice that the people did nothing, they just stood by watching.

Next we have the government representatives—the soldiers who mock him. They also taunt him telling him to save himself. A further insult is that Pilate has had the inscription of "This is the King of the Jews" put over him. Again, what was meant as an insult is actually truth. Jesus is the King of the Jews.

Finally, a criminal derides him. He challenges Jesus saying "are you not the Messiah, save yourself"—then he adds "and us." You can hardly blame him as he hangs there dying painfully.

Fred Craddock points out that Jesus refuses to call upon the power of God for his own comfort and security. To save others he can't save himself. To save others he can't save himself. That's what atonement is all about. The other criminal gets it. "We are getting what we deserve for our deeds but this man has done nothing wrong." Jesus, the innocent one, takes on our sin.

Douglas Copeland, in his book, *Life After God*, writes metaphorically about the atonement.

Mom had left the TV on in the bedroom, next room over. CNN was saying that Superman was scheduled to die later this week---in the sky above Minneapolis, and I was momentarily taken out of myself. I thought this was certainly a coincidence, because I had just visited the city of Minneapolis a month ago, on a business trip: a new crystal city, all shiny like quartz rising over the Midwest corn fields. According to the TV, Superman was supposed to die in an air battle over the city with a supremely evil force, and while I knew this was just a cheesy publicity ploy to sell more comics—and I haven't even read a Superman comic in two decades—the thought still made me feel bad....

On another channel there were pictures of a zoo in Miami, Florida, which had been whacked by a hurricane and there were pictures of ducks and tall elegant birds swimming in the wreckage except they didn't know it was wreckage. It was just the world.

And then there was that same news story again about Superman's dying—except I realized I got the city wrong—he's supposed to die over *Metropolis*, not Minneapolis. But I was still sad. I have always liked the idea of Superman because I have always liked the idea that there is one person in the world who doesn't do bad things. And that there is one person in the world who is able to fly.

We want to believe in that one person in the world who doesn't do bad things. We need someone who is innocent to save us from ourselves. We need a Savior. We long for judgment to be turned to mercy. Diogenes Allen, an author and professor at PTS explains how we really don't want justice. Justice would mean that we would experience all of the consequences of our own behavior. Ultimately, that means death. Thank goodness we don't believe in a God of

justice alone but a God of grace. We believe in a God who will save us by taking on the consequences of our behavior and offer us eternal life.

Jesus' response to the mocking and the suffering and death is forgiveness. We see this act of salvation in a situation in which "save" has been used in taunts and ridicule. But forgiveness is spoken before the slander is spoken. Jesus continues his ministry even on the cross. His power isn't negated by the cross. His royal status and role as Savior is confirmed, not denied. Jesus manifests his power as he forgives and promises the criminal paradise. The Most High offers the criminal more than he asks, Jesus promises that the criminal will not only be forgiven, but will be with him in paradise. We, like the criminal, are given a new understanding of salvation and death. Now, for his people, death leads straight into the presence of Jesus.

In the Reign of Christ, the world is turned upside down. The Messiah doesn't just overthrow the Roman government. The Almighty King chooses to suffer and die on a cross. The innocent takes on sin. Death is not the end but the new beginning—a beginning of living with Christ face to face.

Amen.

-Sheryl Kinder-Pyle  
November 25, 2007