

Text: Matt 27.39
St Stephen's

April 6, 2007
Good Friday

The "Passers-By"

Seven Words Spoken to Jesus on the Cross

The soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the praetorium, and they gathered the whole battalion before him. And they stripped him and put a scarlet robe upon him, and plaiting a crown of thorns they put it on his head, and put a reed in his right hand. And kneeling before him they mocked him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" And they spat upon him, and took the reed and struck him on the head. And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the robe, and put his own clothes on him, and led him away to crucify him.

As they went out, they came upon a man of Cyrene, Simon by name; this man they compelled to carry his cross. And when they came to a place called Golgotha (which means the place of a skull), they offered him wine to drink, mingled with gall; but when he tasted it, he would not drink it. And when they had crucified him, they divided his garments among them by casting lots; then they sat down and kept watch over him there. And over his head they put the charge against him, which read, "This is Jesus the King of the Jews." Then two robbers were crucified with him, one on the right and one on the left.

And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads and saying, "You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross."

Matthew 27:27-40 (RSV)

You know of 7 words spoken **by** Jesus from the cross during those hours. Did you know that there were also 7 words spoken **to** Christ while he hung on the cross? Seven groups of people, from all walks of life make comments to Jesus while he hung on the cross. We will look at their words this afternoon.

As we do, I think **you will notice something**. We will see things in a stark honesty. The cross does that. **The crucifixion of Jesus is the most honest event in human history**. Because it is there that **God's own heart** is finally and fully **put on public display**. It is there his grace, his gift-love, his unmerited, undeserved, one way love is uncovered, as the blood of Jesus flows it is revealed, and set in place as a Kingdom power beyond and above every other power in the cosmos. **Don't miss** the public display of one way love today.

But here is what happens. As God uncovers his own heart in the crucifixion of Jesus, **every other heart is uncovered** as well. As people draw near the cross and stop to look and comment, something strange takes place: secret thoughts are revealed, hidden motives are uncovered.

The cross has a **revealing power**. It **exposes** everything. As one theologian said, **"The cross says what a thing really is."** When you learn to look at life alongside the cross, everything is seen for what it really is. Intimate thoughts, private motives, true intentions, core values—no matter how hidden to others, no matter how hidden to ourselves—come to the surface. When you draw near to the cross, everything is revealed for what it truly is. The cross uncovers everything and reveals everything, and sets them **next to God's own heart**, now also open for all to see. Then, in that very honest place remarkable things can happen, gospel things, grace things.

So **today we draw near to this honest place**. We watch as the cross does its work, uncovering heart after heart as people stop and look and make their comments. We will mark their journeys. And we will mark as well the uncovered heart of God, the depth of his love now on full display as the blood of his son flows. And as we draw near, our own hearts, too, will be opened wide and set alongside God's own. Watch out! Take a big breath! Because this is the place, this is the day where gospel things, grace things happen.

I. The Passers-By

The first group we see are called by Matthew "*Those who passed by*." They weren't in it for the duration. They were hurried people on their way

to keep important appointments, busy people with a busy day in front of them. Their calendar was full, they had people to see and places to go. But they **wanted to take a peek** that afternoon.

They had **heard about Jesus**; everyone had heard about Jesus. It is worth giving some thought to what they had heard. They'd probably heard something about **his ministry** - certainly something about his **miracles**, and probably something about his **teaching**. Maybe a few of the **stories** he had told. I'm sure they had heard that he **claimed to be – someone special**—the "Son of God". They thought that was a bit much, and they threw it back at him. They knew about his **conflict with the Pharisees**, and something he had said that week about rebuilding the temple in 3 days if it was destroyed. That was over the top, they thought! Of course they knew all about his **entry into Jerusalem**, about his **trial and condemnation**. So on a busy day, they "passed by" to check it out at a distance. To check him out.

They shook their heads, they threw up some insults. *"Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!"* They probably hadn't given it all that much thought, but they were **sure of this**: The cross & the claim to be the Son of God do not go together:

A miraculous healer who cannot rescue himself?

A messianic King nailed to a Roman cross?

The Son of God whom God abandons to this spectacle of shame?

Shame and glory, weakness and power do not go together.

They were sure. **Case closed.**

So they taunt. They make fun.

"Hey you, 'Temple-basher'. Just went by the Temple and it looks pretty good to me – but you're not looking so good.

Hey you, 'Three-Day-Builder'. Need a little help these days?

Hey you, 'Son of God'! That isn't a Roman cross up there, is it?

Now really, we'll believe you. We're ready to sign up right now.

Just come down and we'll get right in line!"

'Just come down'—that would be the taunt he would hear all afternoon, and we will have much to say about it today. Well, I'll bet if he had come

down, they would have gotten right in line. Wouldn't you? And **this would have been the time.** To strike the Pharisees dumb. To call on those 12 legions of angels. To come down from the cross. It would have been great!

But as his days on earth would to a finish, **his miracles wound down.** During his last week, there were hardly any miracles at all. Just a fig tree that was withered. And an ear that was healed. **Neither one of those shifted the tide** that had turned against him. They weren't supposed to. Because, he said, *'my hour has come'*. Because the shift of the tide would be the occasion for **the greatest miracle, the 'no miracle'** of his willing surrender. The greatest miracle he ever did would be **the miracle he did not do.** So he did not come down. He stayed on the cross. Willingly. He suffered, willingly. He drank the cup to the bottom, willingly.

Miracles they demanded, and the greatest miracle of all, that of a God whose love was so great as to be willing to suffer for his people to set them free, rose that very hour before their very eyes. But the 'passers by' missed it. They passed on by.

Had they remained longer, had they looked deeper, they might have seen it. "Save yourself" was their taunt. But he would rather save them—and us. **The 'no miracle' becomes the very greatest miracle of all.**

I've often wondered what these 'passers-by' thought in the days and months to come, when the rumors of his resurrection began to circulate. I've wondered if they thought again about his promise to rebuild in 3 days—if they thought again about their own taunts of a dying man—if they thought again about God's undeserved love.

The cross is **the place that can make you think again about a great deal.** Because it says what a thing really is. It says who God really is, and what his love really is, and who we really are. And that is worth thinking about again and again.

Let us pray..

Pray for the busy people of our land, those so rushed, so stressed, so distracted with what in the end matters little. that they pass by what matters most. Pray that they would stop and draw near to the cross of Jesus.