

Sermon – Luke 23:1-49
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Grace Lutheran Church
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“He Knows What He’s Doing”

1. There isn’t much left to say, so for once I’m not going to say much. We’ve said enough as it is, our hollers of hosanna becoming cries to crucify. Here we see the work of our hands, as the One who entered Jerusalem in triumph is nailed to a roughhewn cross. We’ve said enough, *but Jesus speaks*: “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” We might plead such innocent ignorance, of course, like a child standing over a broken plate or under a broken window; *I don’t know what happened!* As if such things break on their own; as if Jesus just happened to get crucified. But here we are, caught red-handed with the rest of humanity as the spikes sink into his blood-red hands. We know what we’re doing; it’s what we’ve always done – saying no to the God of love and life, preferring to strike out on our own. And yet there he hangs, forgiving us. We often say that Jesus died to forgive us for our sins, and that’s the truth. But Jesus also died *because* he forgave our sins. His entire ministry was spent flinging free forgiveness on those we’d rather condemn. So now here he is, condemned. But he keeps on forgiving us.
2. Here, in Luke’s gospel, Jesus speaks three times from the cross. First, he prays to his Father to forgive us. Because even though we know what we’re doing, crucifying the Lord of Life, we don’t know what this will do, what effect it will have. For in God’s bizarre grace, it is the killing of the Great Forgiver that our forgiveness becomes guaranteed. *Do even this*, God is saying, *and I will forgive you. If I can forgive you for killing my Son, for what will I not forgive you?* In the very act of attempting to deny forgiveness and rid ourselves of God once and for all, we have unwittingly conspired to flood creation with forgiveness. Here, on the cross, Jesus speaks forgiveness. And

- this cross-shaped, cruciform promise is for you. Through the death of the Christ, you are forgiven.
3. Jesus speaks again: “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.” Having spoken of forgiveness that cancels sin, Jesus now creates a future that opens up in spite of our past. Of course the criminal deserves no such thing. That’s why it’s called grace. Crucified, Jesus disrupts the very fabric of creation, turning endings into new beginnings, bringing hope to the hopeless. And now, even in death, we can behold the gift of new life. And this cruciform promise is for you. Through the death of the Christ, life abundant and eternal is yours.
 4. Jesus speaks a final time: “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.” Even in death, Jesus knows exactly where he’s come from, precisely where he’s going. Even in death, he knows just where he is – held safe in the hands of his Father. God’s light grasp upon Jesus is secure, and not even death can undo it. Baptized into Jesus’ death, this is where you now live your life, and where you will one day die your death, safe in the hands of the God who will not let you go. This cruciform promise is for you. Through the death of the Christ, you have become a daughter or son of our heavenly Father.
 5. Here, this morning, we see and hear again of the One who was crucified for us. We might not have known what we were doing, but Jesus knew what he was doing all along. He was dying to forgive you, to gift you with a future, to place you in the hands of the Father. All for you, all for everyone, and all for this whole world. And now, having spoken, Jesus breathes his last. Peace, now. Look upon the life-giving cross and the Christ who loves you enough to give his life for you. Behold your salvation: **you are forgiven for a future with the Father**. And listen, for the death of Jesus is just the beginning. God is not done speaking. The stony tomb cannot long contain the Word of Life.

But I'm getting ahead of myself, and have already said enough. Quiet yourself now, and listen to Jesus. The cruciform promise is for you. Amen.