

Rev. Gregory Gibbons  
Lola Park Lutheran Church  
Redford, MI 48239

Luke 22:39-46  
NAMES OF WONDROUS LOVE-JESUS

INI

The Lenten season is such a wonderful time of the year. Every year we have the blessed opportunity to focus on God's love for a fallen world through the suffering and death of His Son Jesus Christ. Every year I have the privilege of going into the diamond mine of God's Word and choosing a number of gems to share with you, God's people. I pray that our faith is strengthened as we focus our attention this year on the names of wondrous love that our Savior had.

We know many if not most of these names, but we will start with the one that is most familiar and probably our favorite. It is the name Jesus. As little children we sang, "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so." It doesn't change as we get older. We think of many hymn verses and Bible passages with the name Jesus that brings peace to our troubled hearts.

Why is the name Jesus so precious to us? It is not a name made up by a man who liked how it sounds. Rather it is a name that came from heaven itself. God himself picked this name. Both Mary and Joseph were told by angelic messengers: "You shall give him the name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." This name fits him perfectly. It describes what he came to do in fulfilling God's plan of salvation.

As we have come to Ash Wednesday we are once again reminded that we are mortal. The wages of sin is death. Dust we are and to dust we will return. There is nothing we can do to save ourselves. Yes, we do need a Savior and God provides just what we need. Every name of wondrous love tells us a little more. In the name JESUS we see his love for a fallen world and his love for his Father's will.

We go this evening to a garden called Gethsemane. It is located at the foot of the Mount of Olives directly facing the city of Jerusalem. We encounter Jesus as he approaches the garden. It is a place where Jesus often went to pray. It is a quiet place, a secluded place, a place well known to Jesus' disciples. The apostles have celebrated the Passover meal with Jesus. He has instituted the Lord's Supper, but its meaning has not yet sunk in. There are only eleven of the apostles at this point. Judas has left the group to betray Jesus although the other apostles are unaware of that fact. Jesus knows what is coming. Peter, James and John join our Savior in the Garden. Jesus asked them to watch and pray so that they would not fall into temptation. But they are sound asleep.

Meanwhile Jesus is engaged in prayer, a prayer so powerful that blood mixed with sweat drips down his face. He is on his knees. He falls to the ground. He prays, "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me." He prays the same thing a second and a third time. We fearfully watch in astonishment.

What is going on here? What is it that causes Jesus to fall to his knees and beg his Father to take a cup away? Isn't this the same Jesus who threw the money changers out of the Temple in Jerusalem twice? Isn't this the same Jesus who continually stood up to the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law, calling them hypocrites and whitewashed tombs? Isn't this the Jesus who stood up to the winds and the waves and told them to be calm and they immediately were?

What is this cup that fills his heart with dread? This is the cup of God's wrath upon sin. God is a God of justice who demands that every sin be punished in full. In that cup is the disobedience and rebellion of Adam and Eve, the drunkenness of Noah, the deception of Jacob, the treachery of Joseph's brothers, the pride of Joseph, the impatience of Moses, the adultery and murder of David, the lust of Solomon, the despair of Elijah, and these are the great heroes of faith. We haven't even touched the sins of those we would call truly evil. You have every sin of every person who ever lived and would live including you and me. There was every open sin and every hidden sin, every sin against God and every sin against one's fellow man, every lie, every half-truth meant to hurt, every sin that accuses every day and every sin that has been long forgotten. There are sins so evil that we can't even conceive of doing such things. Yet they were in the cup that Jesus was asked to drink. And he was not merely to take a small sip of this vile, foul bitter cup, but he was asked to drain it completely. The stench of sin was so great that we could not even comprehend the smell of it. We cannot imagine the task set before our Lord as he would take on our sin and suffer God's just punishment for them. He knew what it would mean. In just a short while he would be forsaken by his Father's love for the first time in all eternity as he would become the Sin-Bearer. Was there any other way?

The world laughs when it hears the word "sin." How silly! How outdated! People are just expressing themselves. There is no standard of right or wrong, no standard of absolute truth. We have built-in excuses for everything. Everybody else is doing it. I couldn't help myself. Nobody really got hurt, did they? We get used to the pet sins that afflict us. They really don't bother us. The idea that they should bother God is foreign to us. And the idea that they should send the Son of God to the cross just boggles our minds. Is sin really that serious? Is sin really that deadly? The answer is "yes!" A just and a holy God cannot tolerate sin, let alone celebrate it as we do. A just and a holy God must punish sin, or he cannot be a just and a holy God.

Why is Jesus there in the Garden wrestling in prayer? Why does a mother get up in the middle of the night every night to feed her baby? Why will she stay up all night cuddling that child when he is sick? Why will a father take on a second job and go without many things he wants so that he can send his child to college? We know the answer. It is because they love them. Why would Jesus plead "take this cup from me," but then add, "yet not my will, but yours be done!"? Do we really have to ask why? It is because he loves us with a love that is impossible to comprehend, a love that is so incredible that we cannot find the human words to describe it. Sadly, many will never begin to comprehend this love because they refuse to see their sins. But that doesn't change Jesus' love for a fallen world.

As we marvel at Jesus' love for a fallen world, we also marvel at his love for his Father's will. We know how we react to God's plan for us. Adam and Eve lived in a perfect world and yet felt that they could not trust God to take care of their basic needs. They wanted to be like God, knowing good and evil. The Israelites rebelled against God time and time again in the wilderness. It made no difference what God did for them in love. They demanded more. They demanded something else. They constantly complained and accused, "You brought us out here to die." And we had better think of ourselves and how we react to God in our everyday life.

Yes, Jesus knew what was coming. He knew the painful toll that his suffering would take on both his body and soul. The physical suffering would be great but the spiritual and emotional suffering would be so far off the charts that we could not even begin to comprehend it. Is there any wonder that Jesus would look for a different way if such a way were available? Yet when he Father said, "No, this is the only way!," Jesus did not question his Father's will. He did not grumble or complain about his Father's will. He did not doubt his Father's wisdom. Rather he would pray for strength to carry out that will. He would surrender his own will to that of his Father. He would give up what was comfortable in order to do what had to be done. It would intensify as he would go from Gethsemane to Calvary, but God's will would be done!

We forget how selfish and self-centered we really are. We think that the world revolves around us. We want to have our way all the time and woe to anyone who gets in our way. I would much rather eat donuts and double cheeseburgers than vegetables and I would much rather sit around watching football games than going to funerals. I would much rather be the one being served than the one doing the serving. I would much rather have plenty of money in my bank account, a new car, a body much younger than I have now and plenty of other things that I would love to tell you about if you have a couple of extra hours. If I have those things I will indeed pray, "Thy will be done!"

But when God doesn't give me those things or takes them away from me, when my health gets worse and my legs get weary, when my checkbook gets depleted and doesn't balance, when my children don't do what I think they should be doing, when my plans don't work out again and I spend my money on car repairs rather than new golf clubs, when the cross God has given me to bear plunks down on my shoulders and seems far too heavy for me to carry, then what do I do? Do I pray, "Not my will, but yours be done!" Or do I grumble and complain that God once again has been unfair to me?

We always have to remember that we are not dealing from a position of strength. We have nothing to offer God but our sins. We like to come to God as the Pharisee did, boasting of his good works and thanking God that he was not like other men, especially that good for nothing tax collector. I pray that we don't. Even our so-called good works without Christ are as filthy rags. This is a day when we approach God as the tax collector did, falling to our knees and saying, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!"

My friends, God has indeed been merciful to us. He does not treat us as our sins deserve. He gives us the very opposite of what we deserve. The Lenten message is that Jesus Christ is our Savior. He would do anything and everything that it took to rescue you from your slavery to sin, death, and the power of Satan. Remember that each and every day of our Lenten journey. Remember it each and every day of your life. Jesus lived up to the meaning of his name and changed our eternal future. Glory be to Jesus! AMEN.