

This morning, we're going to read Luke's account of Jesus' final hours leading to the cross. Let me encourage you to go ahead and open your Bible to Luke 22:39—if you're using the Bible in the seat rack in front of you, that's page 856.

I've broken the Scripture into 4 segments this morning, each corresponding to a particular setting—A Garden, a Courtroom, a Cross, and a Tomb. I've invited 4 congregants to read the Scripture, and after each reading I will offer a brief reflection on the text. At this time I'd like to invite Kirsti Satake to come and read Luke 22:39-53.

**A Garden: Luke 22:39-53**

*“39 Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives, and his disciples followed him. 40 On reaching the place, he said to them, “Pray that you will not fall into temptation.” 41 He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, 42 “Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.” 43 An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. 44 And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground. 45 When he rose from prayer and went back to the disciples, he found them asleep, exhausted from sorrow. 46 “Why are you sleeping?” he asked them. “Get up and pray so that you will not fall into temptation.”*

*47 While he was still speaking a crowd came up, and the man who was called Judas, one of the Twelve, was leading them. He approached Jesus to kiss him, 48 but Jesus asked him, “Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?” 49 When Jesus' followers saw what was going to happen, they said, “Lord, should we strike*

*with our swords?” 50 And one of them struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his right ear. 51 But Jesus answered, “No more of this!” And he touched the man's ear and healed him. 52 Then Jesus said to the chief priests, the officers of the temple guard, and the elders, who had come for him, “Am I leading a rebellion, that you have come with swords and clubs? 53 Every day I was with you in the temple courts, and you did not lay a hand on me. But this is your hour—when darkness reigns.”*

When we think of gardens, we envision life, beauty, and delight—but the Garden of Gethsemane held only agony for Jesus. In the Garden, Jesus suffered the agony of impending betrayal and denial. One of His own would hand Him over to soldiers. One of His own would deny knowing Him. All would flee this Garden of Agony, leaving Jesus utterly alone.

In the Garden, Jesus suffered the agony of impending crucifixion—He anticipated the excruciating pain that awaited Him. Jesus also anticipated the agony of God-forsakenness. He would bear the weight of the world's sin, and in doing so, for the first time in eternity, He would experience a barrier between Himself, God the Father, and God the Spirit. Jesus' anguish was so great that His sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.

In our most anxious hours, we tend to ask the question, “Where is God?” We say to ourselves, “If God were present, I wouldn't have to experience this pain/difficulty.” This way of thinking has no biblical basis. In our present world, no matter how sin-stained and broken, God is never absent. God is present, and, we regularly face pain.

In Jesus' most anxious hours, He was not alone; vs 43 tells us that *"An angel from heaven appeared to Him and strengthened him."* We ask the question, *"Is God present?"* but God is never absent in our pain. A better question is, *"Will God deliver me from this pain, or will He strengthen me so I can endure it?"* Jesus asked to be delivered from the cross but the Father didn't deliver Jesus, He strengthened Jesus, and in turn, Jesus delivered us from sin and death.

Before Jesus left this Garden of Agony, He performed His final miracle. As Jesus was being arrested, Peter drew his sword and chopped off a man's ear—Jesus healed this wounded man. This physical healing mirrored what would happen on the cross—Jesus offers life to those who seek His death.

At this time I'd like to invite Ronnie Scott to come and read Luke 22:54-23:25.

**A Courtroom: Luke 22:54-23:25**

*"54 Then seizing him, they led him away and took him into the house of the high priest. Peter followed at a distance. 55 And when some there had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and had sat down together, Peter sat down with them. 56 A servant girl saw him seated there in the firelight. She looked closely at him and said, "This man was with him." 57 But he denied it. "Woman, I don't know him," he said. 58 A little later someone else saw him and said, "You also are one of them." "Man, I am not!" Peter replied. 59 About an hour later another asserted, "Certainly this fellow was with him, for he is a Galilean." 60 Peter replied, "Man, I don't know what you're talking about!" Just as he was speaking, the rooster crowed. 61 The*

*Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him: "Before the rooster crows today, you will disown me three times." 62 And he went outside and wept bitterly.*

*63 The men who were guarding Jesus began mocking and beating him. 64 They blindfolded him and demanded, "Prophecy! Who hit you?" 65 And they said many other insulting things to him. 66 At daybreak the council of the elders of the people, both the chief priests and the teachers of the law, met together, and Jesus was led before them. 67 "If you are the Messiah," they said, "tell us." Jesus answered, "If I tell you, you will not believe me, 68 and if I asked you, you would not answer. 69 But from now on, the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the mighty God." 70 They all asked, "Are you then the Son of God?" He replied, "You say that I am." 71 Then they said, "Why do we need any more testimony? We have heard it from his own lips."*

*23:1 Then the whole assembly rose and led him off to Pilate. 2 And they began to accuse him, saying, "We have found this man subverting our nation. He opposes payment of taxes to Caesar and claims to be Messiah, a king." 3 So Pilate asked Jesus, "Are you the king of the Jews?" "You have said so," Jesus replied. 4 Then Pilate announced to the chief priests and the crowd, "I find no basis for a charge against this man." 5 But they insisted, "He stirs up the people all over Judea by his teaching. He started in Galilee and has come all the way here." 6 On hearing this, Pilate asked if the man was a Galilean. 7 When he learned that Jesus was under Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him to Herod, who was also in Jerusalem at that time.*

**8** When Herod saw Jesus, he was greatly pleased, because for a long time he had been wanting to see him. From what he had heard about him, he hoped to see him perform a sign of some sort. **9** He plied him with many questions, but Jesus gave him no answer. **10** The chief priests and the teachers of the law were standing there, vehemently accusing him. **11** Then Herod and his soldiers ridiculed and mocked him. Dressing him in an elegant robe, they sent him back to Pilate. **12** That day Herod and Pilate became friends—before this they had been enemies.

**13** Pilate called together the chief priests, the rulers and the people, **14** and said to them, “You brought me this man as one who was inciting the people to rebellion. I have examined him in your presence and have found no basis for your charges against him. **15** Neither has Herod, for he sent him back to us; as you can see, he has done nothing to deserve death. **16** Therefore, I will punish him and then release him.”

**18** But the whole crowd shouted, “Away with this man! Release Barabbas to us!” **19** (Barabbas had been thrown into prison for an insurrection in the city, and for murder.) **20** Wanting to release Jesus, Pilate appealed to them again. **21** But they kept shouting, “Crucify him! Crucify him!”

**22** For the third time he spoke to them: “Why? What crime has this man committed? I have found in him no grounds for the death penalty. Therefore I will have him punished and then release him.” **23** But with loud shouts they insistently demanded that he be crucified, and their shouts prevailed. **24** So Pilate decided to grant

*their demand. 25 He released the man who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, the one they asked for, and surrendered Jesus to their will.”*

Judas’ betrayal in the Garden was followed by Peter’s denial just outside the Courtroom. As Pastor Linda preached last week, each of us—in word and in deed—have denied God; we are all prone to fear, self-preservation, and faithlessness. Robert Robertson captured this sentiment perfectly when he wrote, “Prone to wander, Lord I feel it, prone to leave the God I love.”<sup>1</sup>

As the Courtroom scene unfolds, we know that Jesus is on trial for His life, but it seems as though His accusers are unsure of what to accuse Him of. When they finally get Him in front of Pilate—Jesus was presented as a rabble rouser—stirring up people with His teaching, and opposing the payment taxes—but the real charge against Him was His claim to be God.

You can cut the irony with a knife. The Jews—because of their love for God—demand the death of Jesus, who we know is God-in-the-flesh; God was in their midst and they did not recognize Him. And yet, Jesus doesn’t try to clear things up or straighten them out. Jesus stood silently and received the guilty verdict, He stood willingly as the Accused, knowing that He would bear the weight of God’s judgement over sin.

The crowd begged Pilate to show mercy to Barabbas— a convicted terrorist and murderer—and simultaneously they begged Pilate to crucify the sinless Son of God. Horrible, yes, but not a horrible

<sup>1</sup> Robert Robertson, *Come Thou Fount Of Every Blessing*, 1757

mistake—the cross was the plan of God. At this time I'd like to invite Marcus Wong to come and read Luke 23:26-39.

**A Cross: Luke 23:26-49**

*26 As the soldiers led him away, they seized Simon from Cyrene, who was on his way in from the country, and put the cross on him and made him carry it behind Jesus. 27 A large number of people followed him, including women who mourned and wailed for him.*

*28 Jesus turned and said to them, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children. 29 For the time will come when you will say, 'Blessed are the childless women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!'*

*30 Then "they will say to the mountains, "Fall on us!" and to the hills, "Cover us!"' 31 For if people do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?"*

*32 Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed. 33 When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him there, along with the criminals—one on his right, the other on his left. 34 Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." And they divided up his clothes by casting lots. 35 The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, "He saved others; let him save himself if he is God's Messiah, the Chosen One." 36 The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar 37 and said, "If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself." 38 There was a written notice above him, which read: this is the king of the jews.*

*39 One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: "Aren't you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!" 40 But the other*

*criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence? 41 We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong." 42 Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." 43 Jesus answered him, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise." 44 It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, 45 for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. 46 Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." When he had said this, he breathed his last. 47 The centurion, seeing what had happened, praised God and said, "Surely this was a righteous man." 48 When all the people who had gathered to witness this sight saw what took place, they beat their breasts and went away. 49 But all those who knew him, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.*

**illus:** In the Old Testament, animal sacrifice was required to make atonement for sin. I'm told that in New Zealand there are more sheep than people, but for the average, Jewish, Old Testament family, they wouldn't have had their pick of 30,000 animals—more likely 30. When you chose a lamb for the sacrifice, you chose an animal you had watched over, an animal your children had played with.

When you presented the animal to the priest on duty, you would place your hand on the animal's head—symbolic of the transfer of your sin to this animal. Then the priest would cut the animal's throat. You may be thinking to yourself, "*what has this animal done to deserve this?*" This is exactly the point—the innocent animal suffers in your place.

Did you notice in the text that what is happening **to** Jesus is at odds with what's happening **inside** of Jesus? He's been falsely accused, beaten, and nailed to a tree, and even as He hangs there dying, He's not thinking of revenge, He's thinking of forgiveness, He's asking the Father to be merciful to His executioners.

Verse 37 tells us that the soldiers mocked Jesus, saying, "*If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself.*" They had it all wrong. It was because Jesus **was** the King of Jews that He refused to save Himself—He had come to save the world. It wasn't the nails that kept Jesus on the cross, it was love. Hebrews 12:2 says, "*For the joy set before [Jesus] he endured the cross, scorning its shame*".

I want to share one last thought before we come to our final text; take a look at verse 44. Luke tells us that on the day Jesus died, around noon, "*darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, for the sun stopped shining;*" shortly thereafter Jesus breathed His last.

How does one dispel darkness? In our modern era we might flip the light switch, or turn on a flashlight. Jesus, the Light of the World, stepped down into darkness, but how would He defeat the darkness of sin, separation, and death? In the wisdom of God, darkness of this sort can only be dispelled in one way—it needed to be extinguished from within. Jesus took sin of every kind—things like greed, pride, hatred, and rebellion, the sin of all humanity—into Himself. Like poison injected into a body, sin did its worst to Jesus, sin's power and

fury was exhausted in Jesus' death, and its grip on humanity was broken.<sup>2</sup>

The cross represents the height of humanity's rejection of God, but through Jesus Christ, God has forever bound Himself to humanity. In His divinity, Jesus is very God of very God; in His humanity, He is bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh. Jesus stood in our place, the righteous for the unrighteous—judgement must fall, and Jesus chose to have judgement fall upon Him; He tasted death for us all.<sup>3</sup>

And now I'd like to invite Gina Karlstrom to come and read our final text, Luke 23:50–56.

**A Tomb: Luke 23:50-56**

*"50 Now there was a man named Joseph, a member of the Council, a good and upright man, 51 who had not consented to their decision and action. He came from the Judean town of Arimathea, and he himself was waiting for the kingdom of God. 52 Going to Pilate, he asked for Jesus' body. 53 Then he took it down, wrapped it in linen cloth and placed it in a tomb cut in the rock, one in which no one had yet been laid. 54 It was Preparation Day, and the Sabbath was about to begin. 55 The women who had come with Jesus from Galilee followed Joseph and saw the tomb and how his body was laid in it. 56 Then they went home and prepared spices and perfumes. But they rested on the Sabbath in obedience to the commandment."*

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<sup>2</sup> N.T. Wright, *Evil and the Justice of God*, 85.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Incarnation: The Person and Life of Christ*, 112.

Three days Jesus' body lay in a tomb, and no one expected what came on Sunday morning—resurrection. We have the advantage of history; we know what happened on that Sunday, just as we know what is still to come. The resurrection of Jesus is the promise that one day we too will rise from the sleep of death.

As we wait for that day, hope is our ever-present companion, for we have been forgiven and set free. And as a sign of this reality, Jesus gave His followers a holy meal—bread that symbolizes His broken body, and a cup that represents His shed blood. This morning we eat and drink at the Lord's Table as a sign of friendship and fellowship with God. If the Son has set you free, you are free indeed.

**Invite Servers to Come Forward**