

Trinity 10 (2024)

Last words speak volumes.

The three I am about share with you are not from men who embraced Christian faith but rather from those who disavowed it.

The first is from Anton Szandor LaVey, founder of the Church of Satan:

**“Oh my, oh my, what have I done! There is something very wrong, there’s something very wrong, there’s something very wrong!”**

What he was seeing and experiencing we shall never know, but his words suggest it was terrifying.

The second is from Voltaire, the French Enlightenment writer and philosopher: **“I am abandoned by God and man! I shall go to hell! O Jesus Christ!”**

The third is from David Hume, Scottish philosopher and writer: **“I am in flames.”**

To these three from history, I add one I witnessed myself firsthand.

I was summoned to a man’s house by his wife. After arriving and before entering the room where he was lying in a hospital bed, I heard her ask him if he would like me to come in and have a prayer.

His response caused the hairs on my neck to stand up (and still do): **“No, I don’t want to be saved, I don’t want to be saved. I don’t want to be saved.”**

Within a few hours he was gone, as far as we can tell, without God and without hope.

The question which I wish to place before you this morning is this:

Does God take delight in the destruction of those who reject Him . . . of those who shake their tiny fists in His face . . . of those who say: “Leave me alone.” “I don’t want to be saved.” “I want to do it my way”?

Is the Almighty a ‘flyswatter deity’, One who stands ready to pounce on people like those I have just mentioned and takes fiendish pleasure in so doing?

The answer is NO! “He desires not the death of a sinner, but that rather that he might turn from his wickedness and live,” to quote the Book of Common Prayer.

How do we know? ///

Well, we have it on the authority of the One who puts a human face on the invisible God and, according to Colossians 2:9, in whom dwells “all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.”

From Jesus we get a very different picture from what I have called the flyswatter deity.

In today's Gospel, we find Him weeping over Jerusalem, a city whose leaders had rejected Him and were plotting His death. Even so, He did not relish their destruction but longed for their salvation.

What He saw coming down the turnpike was this:

Rome would eventually grow tired of the endless insurrections being spearhead by Jewish revolutionaries, would-be messiahs, and would swoop in and settle the matter once and for all.

Indeed, what Jesus predicted happened in A.D. 70 when the armies of Rome under Titus surrounded the city and erected an embankment around it making it impossible for anyone to leave. Many if not most of the inhabitants starved and died. It was a horrific scene.

In the end the whole city, including the Temple which lay at the heart of Jewish life and worship, was laid even with the ground.

In another place, Jesus forewarned His people not to stick around and fight when they saw what He was describing beginning to happen. Instead, they were to get out of town, flee to the mountains, leave their possession behind. Many did just that and were saved because they heeded Jesus' warning.

The destruction of Jerusalem vindicated Jesus' claim to be Israel's Messiah. It was just and unavoidable. Yet, as Jesus sees it approaching, He does not rejoice. Rather, He weeps over the city.

The heart of Jesus is the heart of God.

God does not override the choices and actions of his human creatures. These choices and actions are real and have consequences.

Yet, in the words of the hymn, “There’s a wideness in God’s mercy.” His desire is not for the rebel’s destruction but for him to do an about turn – that is what ‘repent’ means – and to live.

In the case of the people of Jerusalem, it seems some did repent. On Good Friday, they followed their leaders and cried out in mob-like frenzy: “Crucify Him, crucify Him.” In so doing, they were guilty of the greatest crime in all of history. They killed their God-sent King.

But on the day of Pentecost, after Peter had confronted them with their crime in his historic sermon, quite a few – around 3000 – did exactly what he had called them to do. They changed their mind. They did an about turn and were baptized in view of their repentance.

Hopefully, most or all of these got the message Jesus had delivered before His death, not to stay when they saw the armies of Rome

approaching and surrounding the city. If they did, they were spared and lived.

What I have said up to now is largely historical . . . something that happened 2000 years ago. But there is a message here for us today.

The God we meet in Jesus remains a God of justice – yes -- but also of mercy. He is for us and not against us. He would have none to perish, but that all should come to repentance, according to 2 Peter 3:9.

For those who have made no profession of Christian faith, those like the men I highlighted at the beginning of this sermon, God's call to them is to cast aside pride, self-sufficiency and bad behavior and look to Jesus . . . kneel at the foot of the cross . . . and find peace.

Words found in Romans 10:9 are for them:

**“If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.”**

In like manner, an old Gospel hymn says:  
**“Come every soul by sin oppressed there’s mercy with the Lord.”**

**“Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out,”** remains Jesus’ pledge and promise to those who hear and heed His call.

Perhaps you know someone who thinks he is beyond God’s reach and rescue.

He has fallen into such a desperate pattern of behavior that he thinks his fate is sealed, no return is possible.

Your job and mine is to tell such a one, not so. Picture a drowning man going down in a body of water. A lifeguard comes to his rescue



and reaches out for him. All the perishing soul has to do is to take the lifeguard's hand. So, it is with the soul that is perishing in the sea of sin.

There is power in the cross. There is healing in Jesus' blood. There is welcome for the sinner.

If you know such a one, perhaps a family member or friend, dare to do your part. Tell them of Jesus' love and promise. If you are able, bring them to church.

But what about those who have already acknowledged Jesus as Lord, Saviour and Messiah, those marked as His own in baptism? Does today's Gospel have anything to say to them? Yes, it does. Jesus weeps for them as well.

For you see, it is easy to get sidetracked, especially when things are going our way . . . to stray from the straight path and thus need rescue.

The good news is: You may have forgotten God, but He has not forgotten you.

I love the words of Augustus Montague Toplady's hymn:

*My name from the palms of His hands  
Eternity will not erase;  
Imprest on His heart, it remains  
In marks of indelible grace.*

Once a young man who had been raised in the church came to me and told me defiantly: **“I don't believe in God.”**

My response: **“He believes in you.”**

And this is true for all of us. When we are faithless, God remains faithful.

The weeping Jesus reveals the depth of His love and care for all . . . for my unbelieving neighbor as well as for myself.

What is on your heart this morning?

Are the cares of this world pressing in on you? Are you trying to deal with them under your own steam?

Are you tempted to doubt the love and care of God . . . to view Him as some far-away, indifferent deity?

If so, picture Jesus looking over the city with tears in His eyes. Know He cares for you.

Let Him take you by the hand and lead you. Let Him be your anchor in life and in death. ///

Last words are revealing. Those with which I began this sermon are chilling. May yours and mine be far different. May we take our lead from Paul who said as he neared the great precipice:

**“I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing” (2 Timothy 4:7, 8).**

What a difference! Jesus is the way, the truth and the life. Follow Him.