

First Presbyterian Church
Salt Lake City, Utah

Rev. Michael J. Imperiale
March 25, 2016
Good Friday

“WORDS TO THE CROSS”
A Word of Scorn: He saved others...
Matthew 27:39-44

39 Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads
40 and saying, “You who are going to destroy the temple
and build it in three days?
Save yourself! Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!”
41 In the same way the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders mocked
him. **42** “He saved others,” they said, “but he can’t save himself! He’s the king of Israel!
Let him come down now from the cross,
and we will believe in him.
43 He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him,
for he said, ‘I am the Son of God.’ ”
44 In the same way the rebels who were crucified with him
also heaped insults on him.

Matthew Henry commented, “It’s an insatiable rage indeed that will not be satisfied with death...” but will mock even the dying.

What’s wrong us human beings that we can mock and insult,
scorn and despise others even as mere passersby? It’s too easy to join in “group think,” but we do
it all the time. Media outlets delight in news of the shameful, embarrassing, ugly variety
(after all “it sells”).

Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, “God’s truth judges created things out of love, and Satan’s truth
judges them out of envy and hatred.” Martin Luther King, Jr. said, “I’ve decided to stick with love.
Hate is too great a burden to bear.”

Yet words of scorn are piled on. “You bragged that you could tear down the Temple and
then rebuild it in three days? Well, show us your stuff! Save yourself! If you’re really God’s Son”
(the very same words sneered by Satan in wilderness just before the beginning of Jesus’ ministry
now echoed at the end – ‘IF you are the Son of God’), come down from that cross!”

One could expect that from the kind of crowd that shows up for a hanging or guillotine in
the village square. But then from religious leaders? Having a great time poking fun at him: “He
saved others - he can’t save himself! King of Israel, is he? Then let him get down from that cross.
We’ll all become believers then! He was so sure of God – well, let him rescue his ‘Son’ now - if he
wants him! He did claim to be God’s Son, didn’t he?”

Before we get self-righteous, you may admit with me the way I enjoy the movie or TV show where the “bad guy” finally gets it. From an early memory of the Wicked Witch, “I’m melting, I’m melting” to the many replays of the Warden’s bullet in *The Shawshank Redemption* to any of the perps on *SVU This* and *SVU That* (now in its 17th season). And these are fictions, let alone real people we can relish to see go down in the end.

But this is Jesus – the Savior/Messiah – fulfilling God’s redemptive plan by offering the perfect sacrifice, by paying the full price, by dying on the Cross in our place for our sake.

He knew what he was doing even with the word of scorn. Jesus knew Isaiah 53:3, “He was despised and rejected;” Psalm 109: 25, “I am an object of scorn to my accusers; when they see me, they shake their heads;” and Psalm 22:6, “I am scorned by everyone, despised by the people. All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads.”

On the Cross, we see the greatest miracle Jesus ever did – the one he didn’t do. “Come down from that cross?” Jesus could but was not going to do that. “I am the good shepherd; I lay down my life for the sheep. I lay down my life—only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again” (John 10:14-18).

So, let them mock, sneer, insult Jesus. He took and takes it for you, for me. He went to the Cross to save us from our sin. All praise to our amazing Savior.