



**Pleasant Hill Presbyterian Church**  
*Connecting faith with everyday life*

Sermon Archives

Date: April 9, 2017

Title: "He Could Not Save Himself"

Scripture: Luke 23: 29-46

Description: On Golgatha that Friday, all the elements of salvation were present: the cross, representing Rome's policy of peace and prosperity through power and coercion; the religious authorities, representing moral purity and the certainty of being right with God; and Jesus. Jesus, however, did not save himself.

Luke and I posted identical scores on the Myers-Briggs personality inventory—that's why we get along so well. Luke and I are so much alike in our take on things, the way we see things and the meaning we get from them.

For example, Luke has Jesus totally in charge that day now called "Good Friday" and I admire a man who can keep things under control when things go wrong, someone who can stay on course, even while they're crucifying him. The women who follow Jesus as he carries his cross along the Via de Rosa are falling apart, weeping and wailing in inconsolable sorrow. Jesus stops mid-way to deliver a short devotional: "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me..." (v. 28-31). Four sentences, 77 words, complete with three illustrative parables. Even as they lift him onto the cross, he asks forgiveness for his executioners, "for they do not know what they are doing," (v. 34) which implies that he *does* know what they are doing. Jesus doesn't die in agony; he "commends his spirit" and "breathes his last". (v. 46) That's my kind of Savior—rising above the fray and lifting me above the storm also.

So I can understand the anger of the chief priests (that's old school for "head of staff") who registered a tiny little complaint, "He saved others; let him save himself." (v. 35) And the soldiers, trained to take charge when things were getting out of control, "If you are the King...save yourself." (v. 37). And the dying criminal, still angry and desperate with pain, "Save yourself and us!" (v. 49) I just wish Luke had written about how Jesus did save himself, so that others (including me) could see how it's done and get saved as

well. Then we wouldn't have to wrestle with the irony of that dark afternoon—that *not* getting saved was Jesus' way of salvation.

All the elements for salvation were right there on Calvary's hill that afternoon

The cross was there, center stage on full display, lest anyone should miss the point.

The Roman cross—until nuclear missiles, there had never been a more effective weapon for those in power to maintain peace and world order. The cross was not simply a cruel means of torture used by sadistic enforcement officers. The cross was a matter of policy: it reminded people that world-wide peace and stability were achieved by the exercise of power and coercion. Be warned—you don't bring into question the benefits of power. Power and control bring stability, prosperity, safety, peace—what more could anybody want from what they call "salvation"?

Off to the side we see the other great means of salvation: religion. The temple system had refined moral purity to an art—every act, every detail had been considered and determined and prescribed. No one has to wonder, question, struggle with doubt or be confused—the religious authorities had done that for you, they'll tell you what to do, what to believe, how to act. Moreover, the Temple itself with its golden dome and exquisite beauty, not to mention the dignity and splendor of its rituals of sacrifice—right religion, undefiled and pure could provide powerful moments of ritual and the unshakeable knowledge that one was right with God. True, one must concede that this assurance is sometimes not as impressive as ruling the world the way Rome does, but one day God will rule the world instead of Rome, and God's people (that's us, of course) will be the ones on top. Besides, knowing with absolute certainty that one is morally pure and right with God, what more could anybody want from what they call "salvation"?

The exercise of power in the world and religious purity in the heart—they were our best shots at making sure life gets fixed and stays fixed. They still are.

All the elements of salvation were present: power, moral purity, correct belief...and Jesus, Lord and Savior. In spite of Luke's presenting Jesus as totally in charge on Good Friday, one thing was inescapably clear to everyone present that day as well as to any of us who pay attention as we read the story: Jesus didn't save himself that afternoon. Hanging there naked and in full view, he showed that power, coercion, control, rightness, respectability, orthodoxy do *not* produce salvation; they produce crucifixion. All those honored and respected elements—look to the cross and see: they do not *bring* salvation, they *destroy* salvation.

Realizing this, we turn to Jesus expectantly. Not with a taunting shout, but an eager whisper, a silent prayer of the heart we find ourselves turning to Jesus in hope: "Come on, Jesus. We understand now. Now do your thing." And I find myself quoting something I heard somewhere (I don't quite remember the source.) "Now, Jesus. "Save yourself and us."

Jesus didn't save himself; it isn't all that clear he saved anybody that awful day.

Read the lines, read between the lines, read even Luke's version: in the gospel of Luke, on *that* day Jesus didn't save himself or anybody else, at least insofar as the story is written. All he did was "commend himself" into the hands of the Father. "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit."

As though only God could save.

Can I live with that? Or, can I live *by* that? Am I willing to walk the path he walked, even when it passes through the valley? He told us, remember, that if we would be his followers, we must take up our cross. Can you do that? Your answer may be the key to salvation itself.