

“Thirsty”

April 7, 2023, at 12:00 p.m.

A Sermon by the Rev. Joe Parrish

DRAFT

All Saints Steenrijk, Chapel of the

Resurrection

Willemstad, Curacao

The Gospel: John 19:28-29

After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfill the scripture), “I am thirsty.” A jar full of sour wine was standing there. So they put a sponge full of the wine on a

branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth.

Dear Lord, may we wait with you one last hour. Amen.

Imagine with me the scenario: a time warp appears suddenly, thrusting the end of the twentieth century at the year 2023, April 7, today's date, right back in touch with the time of Passover in about 27 AD. Jesus is hanging on the cross. A United States helicopter whooshes in a platoon of Marines who deflect the crude

swords of the Roman soldiers, remove Jesus from the cross, administer intravenously a lifesaving saline solution into his veins at the foot of the cross, then medivac him to a quickly arranged field hospital nearby in the Judean landscape. Jesus is fully revived, brought back from the brink of the grave, and lives again, this time protected from the anger of the Jerusalem Temple authorities and the crowd who had gathered for the sport of watching someone die slowly on a crude tree with a cross-arm. Jesus lives!

The last possible time such a rescue of our crucified Lord could have occurred is right at the point Jesus says, “I am thirsty.” Right at that very moment his body is at the last possible time twentieth-first century medicine could possibly save him. He is completely dehydrated, having baked in the hot Judean sun for three hours, with no food or water, losing blood from the wounds he had sustained in his beatings by the Roman soldiers, lungs filling with fluid that would finally suffocate him.

Right at this point the best of twentieth century medicine could possibly have saved him. And then what?

Theologians would have to rewrite what is required for the forgiveness of sins. Still some other animal would be required for the temporary relief of unpremeditated sins, a less than perfect animal in every instance. The Temple sacrifices would have to continue. Jesus, who had brought Lazarus back from the grave would likely have the power to live a very long, even everlasting, and productive life. In fact, without the

human aggression shown in the crucifixion, Jesus could still be alive today--two thousand years old, but alive--the living two thousand year-old man who never dies.

Medicine would be quite different. Instead of checking into the Mayo Clinic or some hospital for the latest heart or liver transplant, one would be making appointments with Jesus for a cure of whatever ails one. The one great problem would be that now there are perhaps fifty times as many people alive on planet earth, and the waiting lines

would be impossibly long. Only a few tens of thousands would be able to garner a few seconds of the miracle healer's time. The rest would still die perhaps in the waiting line. Possibly broadcasting Jesus' deeds could bring some to the healing of faith. As we watch him on our television sets doing his thousands of healings each week, we could place our hands on the television screen, and believing in faith that we have received that healing, we might indeed be healed at a distance. For was not the centurion's servant healed at a

distance--"only speak the word and my servant will be healed" (Luke 7:7)? So through the miracle of modern electronics Jesus' healing capacities could be extended to perhaps millions.

But think again. If such a powerful figure existed, would there not be great jealousy? Would not the less powerful try either to kidnap him or destroy him? Would not a war eventually erupt, destroying the place Jesus was living, and finally ending Jesus' life right during the twentieth century? And then where would we be? If Jesus died the death of

a nuclear war victim, not fulfilling the prophecies that he would be accursed and all accursed people had to die on a tree, as the Torah dictated, what would happen then? Would our salvation be secure? Would our faith be justified? Would our hopes of ultimate safety in heaven be dissolved?

Indeed it was necessary from a prophetic and scriptural point of view that Jesus had to die there in the early first century on a cross. There could be no other solution. No time warp scenario would do. Jesus could not be rescued

from his last heartbeat on the crude cross. Jesus had to die. The perfect lamb that takes away the sins of the world had to be sacrificed for us. No other object or person could possibly stand in his stead. Yes, Jesus had to die, he had to die then, and he had to die on the cross.

“I am thirsty,” the last possible time to rescue a dying person, but no one or no thing could intervene. No futuristic “Journey to the Future” or ‘to the Past’ could ever occur to rescue him. No time travel machine that is popularized in

science fiction films could be constructed to remove him from the cross. His followers would have to be bereft. Peter and the others would have to pull themselves together and realize he had died and had risen. His presence with them following the crucifixion, burial, and resurrection would be proof enough that God's hand had been there all along. His resurrection would be necessary for the Holy Spirit to come and administer God's healing graces to everyone at one time, not requiring us to purchase a television set and to place our

hands on his image on the screen. Some would never have the electricity to power such a device, and they would always be forgotten and left to die without the comfort of the image of Jesus before them on the phosphors of the vacuum tube or on the face of some electronic device. Healing would never have been even-handed. God would heal some and not others depending on their physical or electronic access to God's Son. Yes, Jesus had to die, there, on the cross. Then and only then would we have universal and contemporaneous and

simultaneous access to God's throne through God's Son who constantly intercedes to his Father for us.

The cross had to come first, and always.

Jesus death had to be one of ignominy, an outlandish death, a death that carried with it a curse. And it would be a death shared with others just as despised, with common criminals. For the scene of criminal execution is just what is specified for all who have sinned and come short of the glory of God. We all thirst for God's goodness, but we

have all failed miserably, and we too deserve the death of the condemned. We deserve no mercy, yet God has shown us ultimate and complete mercy, not sour wine on a sponge at the end of a branch lifted to our lips.

Perhaps you will recall Tony Orlando's popular song of several years ago, "Tie a Yellow Ribbon Around the Old Oak Tree." The song is a story about a prisoner who had finally been released from jail. Not being sure that his wife still loved him and wanted him to come home, he wrote to her and said,

"just tie a yellow ribbon around the old oak tree, and I'll know I'm welcome home when I see it. If the ribbon is not there, I'll keep going." You may recall what happened. The ex-convict was on a bus when he passed the house. And what did he see but a hundred yellow ribbons tied around the tree.

We have the same reception waiting for us in Heaven. Our heavenly Father has figuratively tied a yellow ribbon around all the trees in the world in memory of his only Son who died on one of those trees. But by putting our trust in

him, by putting our hands in those terrible wounds, by realizing here is the one hope I really have in this life, by putting my faith in the one who died for me, I have that welcome mat put out for me. I will be welcomed back into the loving arms of my heavenly Father, forgiven, cleansed by the blood of his Son, receiving mercy upon mercy.

Besides these last words of Jesus which we expound upon today, there of course have been other last words. John Rogers who was burned at the stake in 1555 for his religious reforms said as he

died, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.”

About 300 years later the preacher John Holmes was on his death bed when a nurse reached under the covers to feel his feet. She whispered to his relatives that he still lived, explaining, “No one ever died with their feet warm.” John Holmes opened his eyes and made his final point, “John Rogers did.”

At his last breath Beethoven did not say anything. He just shook his fist at the heavens and died.

Many have their final say in their last will and testament. A merchant’s will

said, “My overdraft at the bank I leave to my wife--she can explain it. The equity in my car I leave to my teenage son--he will have to go to work to keep up the payments. Give my good will to the merchant supply house--they made some awful charges on me are entitled to something. My equipment you can give to the junk dealer--he has had an eye on it for several years. I want six of my creditors for pallbearers--they have carried me so long they might as well finish the job.”

William Shakespeare, who had the final word on a lot of subjects, was very aware of the respect the living attach to the last words. In Shakespeare's play, Richard the Second (II), the dying Duke of Lancaster tells the Duke of York, "O, but they say the tongues of dying men enforce attention like deep harmony: where words are scarce they are seldom spent in vain, for they breathe truth that breathe their words in pain."

Jesus said, "I am thirsty."

Some have seen in these words Jesus reaching out for a final taste of comfort

before he succumbs to his wounds. Jesus showed his ultimate vulnerability as a human being, not above it all like some god-like figure, but a humble, dying wretch struggling for his last breath, and remembering the Twenty-third Psalm, "the Lord leads me beside still waters...." Jesus thirsted for another kind taste of those still, cool waters of the Jordan where he had been baptized by John the Baptist, remembering the trickle of water that had curled down from his head as John brought him up to the surface, that trickle which had curled its way into the

edge of his mouth as he heard the voice of his heavenly Father encouraging him, "You are my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased." And Jesus yearned for one last sign of his Father's concern.

But what Jesus got instead was an insistent sour smelling sponge soaked with vile, turned wine vinegar. His last hope of comfort was dashed by that foul branch held to his lips from the taunters below. And the final prophecy of Jesus' life came true, the words of the Psalmist in Psalm 69, Verse 21, "And for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink."

Jesus was ultimately alone, without comfort, without the voice of his Father who had always been there for him before. Jesus faced his final breathing moment with the pungent odor of vinegar souring his last memory of planet earth.

You might wonder why God did not in grief crash down on the planet at that moment, wiping out all the troubling humans he had made once and for all. But in the characteristic air of mercy, God our Father took it all in stride. Because God had a plan. And the plan

involved a perfect sacrifice. And that perfect sacrifice was God's Son. For by putting our hope and trust on that same sacrifice we have final hope and promise that we shall be saved. We shall be saved from the ultimate death we so much deserve. We shall be exonerated from the wrongs we are guilty of. We will find ultimate peace at the end if we have put our trust in God's Son who died that horrible death for us, for US, on that tree at Calvary.

Jesus accepted his horrific death with only seven last words. These seven

words express the feeling of a victim who was suffering for us, the perfect lamb who was dying for us.

Can we but put our trust in him who died on a cross that should have been ours.

Amen.