Miracle of Darkness

In the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Amen. So often, miracles tend to be limited to only needs for this life. Curing the sick, healing the blind, feeding the masses is what God’s Son did. By His presence were blessings for all in a sinful world. Yet, dare we notice the miracles surrounding Jesus’ suffering and death? The season of Lent proclaims blessings greater than what God gives for this life. It is to face the miracles present for us right there at the cross! We find the darkness, the tearing of the temple curtain, splitting of rocks, graves being opened and other wonders. Revolving around Jesus’ sacrifice are the most surprising events many miss. During our mid-week Lenten services, we look at these miracles as a call to repent, to turn away from sin, and to trust in Jesus as the Savior.

The first of these miracles is the miraculous darkness. As the Holy Scripture tells us, “Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour” (Matthew 27:45). Much had happened before darkness fell across the earth. Jesus had been betrayed by one of His friends. The Jewish courts of the Pharisees and Sadducees falsely accused Him. The Gentile courts ruled by Pontius Pilate unjustly crucified Him. From 9am to noon, Jesus prayed things like “Father, forgive them for they do not know what they do.” The Roman soldiers were fighting over his garments. The Jewish leader were questioning the inscription, “The king of the Jews.” Of course, let us not forget plenty of people of all status walked by scoffing at the sight of Jesus.

There is a distinct shift between the first three hours of the cross and the last three hours. Again as the text tells us, “Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour” (Matthew 27:45). The change did not occur with Jesus. He was still on the cross. Instead, it was a miraculous sign in creation. From noon to 3pm, there was nothing but darkness. A certain kind of visible silence was cast upon this world. Everyone knows that without light, there is no warmth, no energy, and finally no possibility for life. Such a miracle would be somewhat hard to miss. As Tertullian, a second-century Church Father boldly put it to his pagan adversaries:

“At the moment of Christ’s death, the light departed from the sun, and the land was darkened at noonday, which wonder is related in your own annals and is preserved in your own archives to this day.” (See “Apologeticum,” book 1, chapter 21)

The non-Christian would find a way to explain the darkness away calling it an eclipse or whatever men want to event. Christians rather than explaining the miracle just proclaimed it in view of the greater glory of the cross.

Darkness coming upon the suffering death of Christ claims Him to be nothing less than God’s Son. If the first words the creator spoke in making creation were, “Let there be light.” Is it all that surprising that the first sign at the cross was to watch the light God created go away? This is more than coincidence because the Old Testament book of Amos states, “And on that day," declares the Lord God, "I will make the sun go down at noon and darken the earth in broad daylight” Amos 8:9 (ESV). The miracle of darkness finally directs all attention to Christ. He said, “I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness” John 12:46 (ESV). It is in the cross where God’s true light shines.

The miraculous darkness also holds a deeper meaning of judgment for sinful humanity. The Greek word for darkness can also be a description of “sin or evil.” In other words, the suffering and death of God’s Son is for a world that has no other way out. Look at what time the darkness fell upon the earth! It is the time of day when the sun shines the brightest. It is the hour when people tend to work the hardest. It is the peak of the day when we can enjoy life at the fullest. God speaks a word of judgment by the miracle of darkness from noon to three. The call of repentance cannot be denied by a sinful world seeped in darkness of unbelief, betrayal, injustice, selfishness, hypocrisy, hatred, false teaching, insincere love and much more. St. John the apostle said it well, “And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil” John 3:19 (ESV). The call to “repent” literally means “to turn” from one thing to another. Miraculously the darkness at the cross works for our good to give faith in the sacrifice of God’s Son.

As much as the darkness speaks against us, it engulfs Jesus Christ on the cross with our eternal judgment. For all the strife, laxity, immorality and darkness in the Corinthians Church St. Paul still proclaimed, “We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor. 5:20b-21). How do we know the darkness fell upon Christ alone? Because Jesus spoke miraculous words in that darkness as St. Matthew records, “And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice…, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (27:46). Martin Kretzmann remarks about these words, “Forsaken, rejected by God: that is the torture of hell” (Popular Commentary 158). To give someone hell is finally to give them Jesus because that is what the Father did for the world. As quickly as God’s Son died, so did the sun shine again. Creation proclaimed the promise that Easter would come on Sunday. Forgiveness, life, and salvation is the gift Jesus extends to a sinful world. It is why His Church by Word and Sacrament proclaims the Lord’s death until He comes.

Ash Wednesday is just as much about preparation as it is about repentance. Martin Luther states in the Small Catechism, “Fasting and bodily preparation are fine outward training.” Jesus in the Gospel reading mentions giving to the needy, praying and fasting as part of the Christian life. The ashes upon our foreheads mark the start of a season set upon the sacrifice of God’s Son. Our baptism already proclaims for us this kind of death and life daily. Yet, part of Lenten preparation comes with more times for worship, opportunities for adult instruction, making room at home for devotions, or as suggested by our LCMS president to join him in praying the Litany daily. Why do anything? Because Jesus has done everything, the miracle of darkness shows us He is the light of God’s love for us all. Amen. Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, be with your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting, Amen.