



# MARTIN LUTHER LUTHERAN CHURCH

Good Friday (April 22, 2011)

When love buds and a new relationship blossoms, a word is used to evaluate the sustainability of the relationship, the word ‘deserve.’ Does he deserve her? Does she deserve him? Because if she’s bubbly and he’s sullen, or he’s athletic and she’s dumpy, or he owns a new Audi and she’s getting her car repossessed, then they cannot deserve each other. So the conversations go, anyway.

Christians say a lot of nice things about their relationship with Jesus, even sing them. “Jesus loves me.” “How he loves us.” “Jesus shall reign.” “What a friend we have in Jesus.” But at least once a year we need to acknowledge that at the core of the relationship between Jesus and us, the most accurate description of our relationship is that Jesus is too good for us, that we do not deserve Jesus.

Jesus came into this world to cleanse us and give us an eternal home, and the innkeeper sends him off to be born “away in a manger,” so his first smell is that of animal feces.

Jesus is raised in Nazareth – a smelly, dump of a town. “Can anything good come from Nazareth?” a skeptical disciple asks.

At the end of his life, Jesus is killed at Golgotha – the location of Jerusalem’s city dump. His last smell is that of our hot rotting trash.

From the beginning to the end, humanity gives Jesus almost nothing but its worst: its smells of stench, its prideful disbelief, its fierce mocking, its brutal beatings, and finally its public execution.

Jesus comes to us with love, with affection, with hope for our lives, and is met with hatred, with jeers, with a grim torture and murder.

Yet the Hebrew word translated hell or dead is Sheol and the word for Heaven is Shiloh. Those different ancient places with similar ancient names assure us: God can take our pain, our suffering, our stench, and transform it.

God turns our trash into treasure, our Sheol into Shiloh, taking the worst we could ever offer, and making the best of it. He reminds us that the Christian walk is not about always being first or strong, but it is often about being weak, being despised, losing our lives to find true life in the One on the cross.

So hang your heads today, dare not walk upright, but every time you smell something bad, and every time you see something wrong in the world, and every time you do something wrong in your life, apologize to the one who came to this world amidst stench and disappointment and sin and gave his life for us all anyway.

May all our praise and all our thanks be to Jesus, who gives his life away for those who do not deserve him.

Amen.