

John 19:23-24 - “The Seamless Tunic”

Good Friday, Tenebrae Service 2024

Good Friday brings us to Mt. Calvary where Jesus paid for our sins. The church leaders in Jerusalem reconvened early that first Good Friday to quickly legalize Jesus’ death sentence, which they had already decided upon earlier that evening. Then, in rapid succession, Jesus was tried before Pontius Pilate, Herod, and again by Pilate, who had Him brutally whipped before condemning Him to death. Mark tells us in his Gospel account (15:25), that “*they crucified Him,*” they nailed Jesus to a cross, around the 9am our time.

In the Gospel reading we heard from John, he tells us that the four soldiers who had been in charge of the crucifixion divided Jesus’ garments among themselves. I read in a recent Lutheran Hour Devotion that “according to Roman custom, a man’s executioners inherited the last effects from his body.” But the only personal effects of Jesus that was of any value was His tunic, which was a type of shirt reaching from the neck to the knees or ankles. The reason the soldiers didn’t what to divide this tunic was because it was “*seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom,*” so they “*cast lots for it,*” which was foretold in Psalm 22:18. “*They divided my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.*”

Why do you suppose God, in the midst of the earth-shaking events taking place on the cross, has the writers of Scripture in both the Old and New Testament mention this seemingly minor detail. Of course, there’s nothing in God’s Word that’s minor. As St. Paul tells us, “*All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness*” (2 Timothy 3:16).

For one, this detail about Jesus’ clothing reminds us of how poor Jesus became to make us rich. They certainly didn’t need to build a pyramid to bury Jesus with all His earthly possessions, like they did with the kings of Egypt. At the time of Jesus’ death, He had no possessions worth anything except the shirt on His back, and even that they stripped off His back before He was crucified.

While it’s true that, as God, all creation is His, yet Jesus “*did not count equality with God a think to be grasped, but made Himself nothing*” (Philippians 2:6-7). By our standards, Jesus lived below the poverty line, and yet He had all He needed. This reminds me of some of our homebound members. While at one time they had a big house with all the trimmings, the longer they live and the more care they need, the more possessions they’ve had to give up. Thank the Lord that by His grace and over the years they have learned that life is more than earthly possessions. The person with true riches is the one who has faith in Jesus Christ, and Him crucified (1 Corinthians 1:23).

We don’t need to have an abundance of things to know that God is with us. We can trust in His promise: “*I am with you always, to the end of the age*” (Matthew 28:20). He also promises to provide us with all that we need. “*Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you*” (Matthew 6:33).

I'm guessing that most of us here today have more than we need. And if some day we have to give up some of the extras, our Lord will still be with us to care for us and enable us to keep the most important thing, our faith in Him. Such faith frees us from our worries and fears, and fills us with thanks and praise.

But back to Jesus. Even though the soldiers stripped Jesus of His earthly garments, He was in the process of, in a sense, weaving a new garment, a seamless tunic not made with human hands, or earthly materials like cotton. And He was making this seamless tunic not for Himself but for us.

Weaving involves interlacing two treads. And the seamless tunic which Christ wove for us also consisted of two threads. The first thread, is Christ's holy life. Even the chief priests and Pharisees had to admit that, even though they were constantly looking for Jesus to make the slightest mistake. Jesus was in every respect "*without sin*. (Hebrews 4:15). Only a human "lamb of God" without blemish could pay for our sins, and Jesus was certainly that perfect Lamb of God.

The second thread woven into this seamless tunic is Christ's damning death in payment for our sins, since "*the wages of sin is death*" (Romans 6:23). The Scriptures say that "*without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness*" (Hebrews 9:22). The OT book of Leviticus speaks of the daily sacrifice of animals, but all of them were only shadows of the sacrifice that would pay for our sins—the sacrifice of the perfect God/man, Jesus Christ, who took our sins upon Himself. As St. Peter writes, "*you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot*" (1 Peter 1:18-19).

Thus, Christ's holy life and His damning death for our sins are the two threads Christ used to weave this seamless tunic, using the cross as His loom. Then, shortly before His death, and knowing that all things had been accomplished, Jesus cried out, "*It is finished, and He bowed His head and gave up His Spirit*" (John 19:30). The seamless tunic that covers us—that takes away all our sins, is complete.

This is why the day of Jesus' Christ's crucifixion is called **Good** Friday. For it was on that day that He finished the seamless tunic that He wove for us through His perfect life and damning death. Then, through this message of the cross and Holy Baptism, God clothes us with this seamless tunic. For as St. Paul writes in Galatians 3:27, "*As many of you as were baptized in Christ have put on Christ.*" He is our seamless tunic, who covers our sins and makes us fit for heaven through our baptism and faith in Him.

All glory be to God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.