

Victoria Ave/Emmanuel Baptist
Sunday, August 2, 2020
Luke 23:32-38 – A Masterpiece!

Have you ever wondered what qualifies something to be a “masterpiece.” I must admit that I am not a big fan of modern art. I look at it and where other people “ooh and ahh” I think “meh!” Usually with some unrefined comment about a toddler being able to accomplish that with some crayons.

In 1967, Montreal hosted what would be considered the most successful World’s Fair of the 20th century, commonly known as Expo ’67. After it closed, many of the displays remained open and became known as “Man and His World.” That closed in 1984.

In the American pavilion which was a giant geodesic dome (which remains at the site today) a painting was commissioned entitled “Voice of Fire” by artist Barnett Newman. It was painted on an 18 ft rectangular canvas background.

When the new National Art Gallery building was built in Ottawa in 1987, this painting was displayed on loan from the artist’s widow. The piece was installed in the gallery with very little fanfare and media attention. BUT THEN SOMETHING HAPPENED...

The National Gallery decided to buy the painting and paid 1.8 million dollars for it. This caused a minor scandal and uproar. Why???? Because of nature of the painting. Here is what it looks like:



At the time, it was mocked by many who would wear t-shirts with the same stripes. Significant because of where it hung....maybe? Who determined that it was a masterpiece? Whatever the answer...today it is estimated to be worth 40 million. One last bit of controversy...in 1992 it was discovered that since when they installed the painting...it was installed upside down.

I probably should give the art world a break. We Christians have a masterpiece that has the world absolutely boggled as to why we consider it so important. In their eyes it is ridiculous, and they often mock our work of art. It is a masterpiece that God put together that contains a roman cross, a crown of thorns, nail-pierced body parts. The masterpiece is topped off with violence, blood, and death. Let's read about it today in LUKE 23:32-38:

³² Two others, both criminals, were led out to be executed with him. ³³ When they came to a place called The Skull, they nailed him to the cross. And the criminals were also crucified—one on his right and one on his left.

³⁴ Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing." And the soldiers gambled for his clothes by throwing dice.

³⁵ The crowd watched, and the leaders scoffed. "He saved others," they said, "let him save himself if he is really God's Messiah, the Chosen One." ³⁶ The soldiers mocked him, too, by offering him a drink of sour wine. ³⁷ They called out to him, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!" ³⁸ A sign was fastened above him with these words: "This is the King of the Jews."

To understand God's Masterpiece...we need to understand the cross: the work, the worth, and the way of the cross...

THE WORK

Why is a Roman cross, a tool of intimidation, violence and death so significant? It is all about the work that was accomplished on it. We are sinful people. We carry a burden of guilt. So often many are afraid to come to God because they are scared, he is going to through them aside...but then Jesus shows up! Jesus comes

before the just judge and offers to pay our fines so that we can go free. The amazing part of this offer Jesus makes on our behalf is that he volunteers. He chose to die. Some might say that he was coerced, some might say that it was the religious leaders fault...but Jesus himself said, ***“¹⁸ No one can take my life from me. I sacrifice it voluntarily. For I have the authority to lay it down when I want to and also to take it up again. For this is what my Father has commanded.”***

He died in our place...but his death was not the completion of the work. Three days after he died, he rose again. Jesus is Lord over death and life, he is the Lord who conquered evil...He is the one who longs to know you, forgive your sin, and have a relationship with you.

WORTH OF THE CROSS

What makes God’s masterpiece priceless? The work on the cross was God’s way of showing justice and mercy at the same time. If you think God can’t love you because of your sin...think again! Why would Jesus willingly die for you if he didn’t find you worthy to do so? Scripture explains it:

⁶When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners. ⁷Now, most people would not be willing to die for an upright person, though someone might perhaps be willing to die for a person who is especially good. ⁸But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. ⁹And since we have been made right in God’s sight by the blood of Christ, he will certainly save us from God’s condemnation. (Rom. 5:6-9).

WHERE THE CROSS LEADS

Finally, God’s masterpiece leads us to where we need to go.

The cross lead us to peace. Shalom...not the absence of trouble but rather the prayer and blessing of receiving every good thing from God. Biblical peace...the fruit of the Spirit is given by the Holy Spirit and it sustains us through the trial and tests of life. As the song states...”because he lives I can face tomorrow, because

he lives all fear is gone, because I know he holds the future, and life is worth the living, just because He lives.”

The cross gives us security. What was once meant to strike fear and obedience in the hearts of the Roman people...has become a symbol of security for today knowing that tomorrow is taken care of. Because of Jesus’ death and resurrection, we can know beyond a shadow of a doubt that our future is secure. There may be ups and downs of life but in the end, if we have put our trust and faith in Jesus, we will hear “well done good and faithful servant...enter your rest!”

Where is that rest! It is the end of the path of the cross. It leads us to eternity with Jesus. Jesus is that way! “I am the way, the truth, and the life, no one comes to the father except through me.” (John 14:6).

Today we gather around the Lord’s Table! Let’s us give thanks today for the work of the cross in making us worthy...and may we remember it until Jesus returns!