

A Sermon on Luke 23:46-47  
in memory of



**Christopher Joseph Fletcher**

November 6, 1959 – September 20, 2022

Saturday, September 24, 2022 – 11:00 am  
A Divine Service of Faith Lutheran Church – CLC  
Manchester, MO  
Pastor Sam Rodebaugh



## Luke 23:46-47

*Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!" And having said this he breathed his last. Now when the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God, saying, "Certainly this man was innocent!"*

### **"He Breathed His Last . . . and Then He Lived!"**

I imagine that all of us here know that Chris struggled with his breathing for a long time. The first time I met Chris was in the back of a moving truck in January; oxygen tank hanging at his side, he apologized to me that he wasn't able to do any heavy lifting, because he couldn't breathe very well. Chris suffered from Interstitial Lung Disease, a progressive scarring of the lungs which makes it very difficult for the body to take in oxygen. That struggle got worse and worse over the last few weeks, until Chris landed in a hospital bed where he breathed his last.

He wasn't *alone*. Certainly, the doctors and nurses were there with him, and I'm thankful that you, Cindy, were able to be there at his side at the end. And at his side was also another, whom Chris knew very well, that was not only *with* Chris but also knew *personally* what Chris was going through. Of course, I'm talking about his Savior. You see, our Lord knew what it was like to labor for each small catch of air and then, finally, to breathe his last. One of the tortures of crucifixion was the possibility of dying from asphyxiation before bleeding to death or dying of shock. And *because* Jesus hung on that cross and breathed His last, He knew and endured the suffering that Chris knew and endured.

But why talk about Jesus' death? Why focus on someone else when we should be thinking about Chris this morning? Simply put, we have good reason to do so. You see, *because* Jesus shared in Chris's death, it means Chris now shares in Jesus' life. They were bound together in life and in death, so that Jesus Christ and Chris Fletcher shared in the same story—lived a single life between them.

Now, that might sound odd to equate Chris and the Son of God so closely together, but it's true. Think about it for a moment. When a young Christopher Joseph Fletcher was brought to the baptismal font, what did that mean? For one thing, it meant that Chris's life was tied to His Savior's, as Paul writes to the Galatians, ***"For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ."*** (Galatians 3:27) In addition to that, his baptism tied him into Jesus' death and resurrection, as Paul also writes to the Romans, ***"We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life."*** (Romans 6:4) From the day of his baptism to his dying day, Chris's life was woven together with his Savior's, a life which still has not ended for Chris.

There were other ways that God brought Chris in close as well. When Chris received the Lord's Supper, He was given His Savior's own body and blood to eat and to drink for the forgiveness of his sins. When Chris came to hear the Word proclaimed in church and in Bible class, that Good News repeatedly assured him that Jesus is the vine and that we are the branches, that we are one with Jesus even as Jesus and His Father are one. And it's because of these facts that we can have joy in our hearts, even on a day like today.

You see, Chris had a much greater problem in his life than any sort of lung disease. When I was at the hospital with Chris and Cindy on Monday, there was a constant stream of doctors and nurses going in and out the whole time I was there. One doctor sat down with a clipboard and started asking Chris all sorts of questions about his family history and his life—he was trying to piece together the reasons for Chris’s advanced stage lung disease.

Of course, whatever the contributing factors were, there was one factor lurking beneath the surface. That was the problem of sin. This problem wasn’t unique to Chris, it’s been the same affliction that every human has faced since Adam and Eve. Of course, you know their story. The devil tempted Eve to eat the fruit of the tree of which God had told Adam and Eve not to eat. She decided to listen to Satan rather than to God; she ate the fruit, handed some to her husband who was with her, and he ate as well. Thus, sin became *the* problem for them, for their children, for Chris, and for you and me.

Because of sin, God placed some painful reminders in their lives so that they would never forget what their *greatest* problem was. ***“To the woman he said, “I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be contrary to your husband, but he shall rule over you.”<sup>17</sup> And to Adam he said, “Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, ‘You shall not eat of it,’ cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life;<sup>18</sup> thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field.<sup>19</sup> By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to***

***the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.***" (Genesis 3:16-19)

Yes, lives would be lived with constant reminders of our sinfulness all around us. The effects of sin would be seen in our relationships, in our labors, in disease, and ultimately, in death. And that's why we're here today, remembering our beloved brother-in-Christ who has died—ultimately, his death is the reminder that sin was *the* problem for Chris. As the Apostle Paul writes, ***"Sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned."*** (Romans 5:12)

Chris knew these things very well. And as Chris lay there in the hospital, he knew that death was a possibility. And that *should* have been the scariest moment of his life, the thought that he could very soon be standing before the God who sees all and hears all and knows all and who promises to judge. I was there with him, Cindy was there, and I was a little scared, and Cindy might have been a little scared. Chris was not. Instead, he told me that while he *was* praying that the doctors could figure out a treatment, he was also hoping that the Lord would just take him home instead. He *wanted* to stand before the Lord.

And that's because, while Chris knew all about his own sin that would only separate him from God, He also had every confidence that he had been forgiven. That his *greatest* problem had already been solved. Even as Chris's breathing failed, he knew that his Savior who likewise breathed his last had done so *for him*. He knew that after Jesus died for his sins and was buried, that Jesus did not stop there. He knew that Christ then rose from the grave, proving that death has no power over God and can have no hold on a Christian either.

Because of this, Chris had no fear about standing before God. He knew that he had already been forgiven. It's interesting to consider, that centurion who was standing at the foot of the cross when Jesus breathed His last—what did he say? ***"Certainly, this man was innocent!"*** A man declared God to be innocent. And in Chris's case, it's the other way around. When Chris breathed his last, God in heaven was the one to declare, ***"Certainly, this man was innocent."*** After all, God had given Chris this promise, ***"The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses us from all sin."*** (1 John 1:7)

Chris was not misguided at all then, when he said he was hoping the Lord would just take him home instead. Really, he was echoing some of Christ's final words, when Jesus said, ***"Father, into your hands I commit my spirit."*** As Jesus hung there on the cross, He knew His Father would not abandon Him to the grave, but He would be raised victorious and be returned to His Father's side. And Chris had the same well-placed confidence, because his life had been tied to his Savior's. After all, Jesus promises, ***"Because I live, you will live also."*** (John 14:19)

Now, maybe you didn't know, but Chris and Cindy moved just last Friday. Their new home in New Douglas, IL, seemed like it was going to be an ideal home for Chris. Their last home had stairs and hills that made it difficult for Chris to get around with his breathing, the new home was all on one level, located on a flat piece of property. No longer would he have to struggle for breath just to get into the front door. Well, Chris never slept in that house, and that's ok. Because while their new home would have been more ideal for him than the last one, his current home is the *perfect* home. Right now, his soul

is enjoying being in the presence of the Lord, and someday his body will join him. In the end, Chris's body will be raised incorruptible, without any of the troubles that affected him in these last days. Then he will stand in the presence of the Lord in his glorified body, where ***"there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain."*** (Revelations 21:4) Those are the former things which will have passed away.

That's all good news for Chris, but I have good news for you too. Just as the Lord granted Chris a peaceful departure from this life, in Christ Jesus, He will also grant us a joyful reunion. As Jesus declares, ***"In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also."*** (John 14:2-3)

There will come a day when God calls each of you to Himself, and you will be reunited with one another and with one Lord. You will stand as one of that host arrayed in white, sins washed away in the blood of the Lamb, waving palm branches and singing, ***"Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb! . . . Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever!"*** (Revelation 7:10,12)

Just like Jesus, Chris breathed his last. And because of Jesus, Chris *continues* to live. May God grant the same to each of us, in Jesus' name. Amen.

***"And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."*** (Philippians 4:7) Amen.