

Jesus, Remember Me

Luke 23:39-43

Trinity Lutheran – Kearney, Missouri

November 20, 2016 – Last Sunday of The Church Year



In the name of the Father, and of † the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Have you ever had an argument with a loved one, a spouse, a parent, a child, an employer, or a good friend? Of course you have. Sadly, arguments and disagreements are part of who we are as sinful human beings. The funny thing to me, however, is how people often disagree over facts neither party is able to properly recount. What I mean is frequently, when either of the parties involved try to recall the precise details of what they've arguing about, neither will be able to agree about what actually happened! One will say: "I told you not to do that." The other person replies: "I wasn't doing that." Then the first one responds: "Yes you were, I saw you." Then they say: "You don't know what you're talking about." "Do too!" "Do not!" "Do too!" "Do not!" Well, you get the picture. We've all been there, haven't we? But what's behind this phenomena? I suspect either one or both of the parties involved is so busy pursuing their own agenda they aren't able to see the reality of their circumstance – and they certainly aren't able to see how they might actually be the one who escalated the matter to critical mass.

As a prime example, I direct your attention to the robbers crucified on either side of our Lord on that first, fateful Good Friday morning. Matthew and Mark tell us that those who passed by hurled insults at Jesus as He hung there on the cross between them. But, here in Luke's Gospel he reveals that one of them had become so brash that he joined in with them. He cried out, saying: "Aren't You the Christ? Then save both Yourself and us!" But as the second thief watched our Lord hanging patiently on the cross – not moaning, groaning, crying out, and certainly not cursing anyone – not even those responsible for placing Him there on that accursed tree – he changed his opinion. He turned aside to rebuke his fellow criminal, admitted that their sentences had been justly handed down, and that Jesus deserved none of this.

He alone had been the one to read aright the inscription which hung on Jesus' cross right above His head: "**This is the King of the Jews.**" Looking

forward to His coming again in kingly power and glory, this misguided fellow then repentantly pleaded to our Lord Christ only that He remember him when He came into His kingdom. That's when Jesus turned to him with the blessed assurance that not only would he be remembered, but that even before night had fallen he would be there with Him in Paradise.

And so here we have before us two men who, in a manner of speaking, are representative of the entire human race. This might not sit too well with you when you first think about it, but consider the facts. Does the Bible not say that we are all sinful and unclean from birth – even from the moment of conception – that there are none who are righteous, no, not even one – that each and every one of us, like sheep, have gone astray – and that the entire human race, together as one, has become unprofitable before God? Does Christ not say that unless your righteous exceeds that of the Scribes and Pharisees you will never enter into the kingdom of heaven – that you must be perfect even as your Father in heaven is perfect – and many other similar sayings which leave no doubt as to your true spiritual condition? If you're going to be honest you really have no choice but to admit that all this is undeniably true – namely, that the two robbers crucified on either side of our Lord that fateful day could easily have been you!

But there's a much more important similarity you dare not miss. That is, that one of the robbers saw the error of his ways and turned to Christ in repentance and faith, while the other chose to die in his sins rather than humble himself before God and man in the admission that he rightly deserved his punishment. The one man self-righteously hurled insults at Christ – and no doubt at his executioners, as well – while the other blamed no one but himself. The one man's observation of Jesus on the cross only increased his rancor – while the other's observation caused him to feel remorse and sorrow over his own sin. Thus he turned to Christ in faith.

Which of these two are you? Are you sometimes angry with God because He "made you this way" –

because you think you have no choice other than to be who you are and do the things you do – or that you have no power to escape your “lot in life?” Do you blame God for your sin rather than claiming responsibility for it yourself? Are you sorry for your sin and your sinning – and I don’t mean just sorry you were “found out,” because after all, in His omniscience God already knows everything you’ve ever done – but are you truly sorry that you’ve greatly offended God by reason of your life, words, thoughts and actions? Do you think others are responsible for our Lord’s crucifixion, or do you recognize your part in it – that it’s your sin which made it necessary for Him to suffer and die?

The second thief recognized full-well his own involvement in this horrible tragedy, as his words so abundantly bear witness: “Jesus, remember me when You come into Your kingdom!” When you think about it, God must have given this man incredible faith. There he was in the midst of being crucified, and he turns to another – a Man who is also being crucified – a Man in the throes of great pain and suffering Himself, perhaps even near death by this time – and he says to Him: “Jesus, remember me!” This man was able to look beyond what he saw with his eyes to another reality. He realized the Man hanging next to him was no ordinary criminal, as his sight and eyes had informed him, but rather, here was a King who could do anything He wanted. So, in humble faith he willingly threw himself at the mercy of this One whose kingdom was not of this world – trusting Him to be gracious even in the midst of His own anguish and pain. Considering the circumstances under which these short words were uttered, could there ever been any greater words spoken anywhere?

What about you? You may not be hanging on a cross – nor is it likely you ever will be – but I have no doubt there have been many times when you felt just as bad as if you had been. What did you see during those times of distress and anguish – only pain and sorrow? Did you feel separated from God and your brothers and sisters in the faith? Did you feel as if everyone else was enjoying the benefits of belonging to God’s family while you were left to fend for yourself? Or, did you enjoy what only the eyes of faith can see – that even in the midst of this dying world you could still have joy and forgiveness in the shed blood of our Savior who alone has made us truly alive through His own suffering, death and resurrection?

You may not be able to see with human eyes the reality of what God has prepared for us in Christ, but that doesn’t set any of it aside. For while others may fail us – and often do – the grace and mercy of Christ will never let you down. Could there be any greater example of that than what we’ve seen here in this text? This man – this criminal whose life was justly being taken from him – when he cried out to the Lord in faith, Jesus immediately assured him that when he died he would enter into Paradise. Though this thief had committed a great many terrible crimes, the grace of God in Christ Jesus was still standing ready to give this robber the glorious gift our Savior prepared for us all – a room in His heavenly mansion where all true believers will dwell as members of His family in true righteousness and holiness forever.

What comforting words these are to sinful, fallen ears. What joy it is to know that in spite of the fact that the sin and rebellion of our first parents – not to mention our own sin – God still chose to send His Son to be our Savior, and to take upon Himself the punishment we deserve. This is He who brought life and immortality and light to all who trust in Him as Savior – and He has procured for us poor sinners not separation from God, but membership in His family. Though we deserve the punishment God promises for all who sin, through faith in our Savior bestowed in Holy Baptism, God enables you, along with that thief, to cry out: “Jesus, remember me!” And in His Word He calls back to you, saying: “You also will be with Me in Paradise.”

But until that day arrives, dear Christian, you must know that our Lord will sustain you through the ministry of His Bride, the Church – where He gives you the privilege of eating and drinking His Medicine of Immortality – the Holy Supper of His Son’s true body and blood – of hearing the Good News of sins forgiven for the sake of God’s only begotten Son – and joyfully declaring His death and resurrection to all whom God places in your path until that glorious Day when He will come again in glory, with all His angels and the entire heavenly host, to bring you home to Himself in heaven, where you will live with Him forever. Amen.

And now that peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds in that one true faith in Christ Jesus, unto life everlasting. Amen.