

November 20, 2016

Last Sunday of the Church Year

“Remembering Who is King”

Luke 23:27-43

One of the problems with people is that no matter how many times we're told, or shown, or know something, we just don't get it. This is true about everybody, but not always about the things. I've seen many, many road signs which clearly state “Slower Traffic Keep Right”. It's what they teach in driving courses. Studies have shown that obeying this rule significantly lowers the chance of auto accidents. But some people still don't get it. For some reason, they think that if they're going 55 in the passing lane in a 55 zone, they can't possibly be the slower traffic, even if everybody else is going 70! They misconstrue reality and think themselves not to be what they are.

But I'm no better in another way. I learned to drive in Chicago. I always calculate, connive and jockey for position in traffic, thinking I'm really making great time. Bridgette and I leave Wednesday night prayer and praise at the same time yet I leave her and her patience with other drivers in the dust because I think I'm just that good...and then she pulls in the garage a whole thirty seconds after I do. I think I'm driving so much more efficiently, but I'm not. But I just keep on driving that way!

The people surrounding Jesus the day of His crucifixion are doing the same type of thing. There's all these women lamenting Jesus' death sentence, but Jesus kind of turns on them and says, “You just don't get it, do you?”

*“And there followed him a great multitude of the people and of women who were mourning and lamenting for him. But turning to them Jesus said, ‘Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For behold, the days are coming when they will say, ‘Blessed are the barren and the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!’ Then they will begin to say to the mountains, ‘Fall on us,’ and to the hills, ‘Cover us.’ For if they do these things when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?’”*

Jesus isn't the victim to be mourned. Jesus is the Savior doing battle. And He has told His disciples exactly how this battle and assured victory will play out. He will die and three days later He will rise. This is the divine plan of the Father and it is coming to pass. Jesus is the Anointed for victory; not a victim to be lamented! Jesus says the mourning of the people of Jerusalem should be for themselves. They are the ones who will be judged—destroyed and scattered by the Romans in less than four decades. They are the ones whose judgment foretells the judgment of all who reject God's Christ.

The Old Testament—their Bible—told of all of this. But they just don't get it.

Likewise, those mocking Jesus don't get it. *“If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!”* Jesus didn't come to save Himself. He came to save the world that is rejecting Him. They just don't get it.

Probably the worst is the thief next to Jesus. *“Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!”* I kind of wish Jesus would have shouted back, “What? You think I'm up here for the view? I am saving you!”

Despite everything they've been taught in Holy Scripture, despite every wisdom Jesus has attempted to impart during His ministry, despite the numerous signs, wonders and miracles He has performed, they just don't get it. To them, Jesus is powerless, deranged, pitiful, a patsy, a victim. They think they know how things stand when in reality, they haven't got a clue.

Jesus will be victorious. They should be afraid. They should lament for themselves. They should be quiet, humble and penitent before God's Christ.

Mankind sure hasn't changed much. Jesus has risen from the dead. A multitude of witnesses spread the Word, wrote it down, became the Christian church, passed on the gifts gained for humanity at the cross and delivered in the message, the supper, the waters of Holy Baptism. Yet so many people, both outside and inside that church, twist the reality around and attempt to live as if the Son of God is something other than Lord and Savior.

We have plenty of lamenters shouting "Jesus! Jesus! Poor, poor Jesus!" looking on in pious devotion, but never really turning the grief where it rightly belongs—upon one's self and the sad, sorry state of one's sinfulness. It's very plain in some churches and very subtle in others—the focus is on my worship, my praise, my service, my faith, my emotion, my being about Jesus—everything except my sin and my need for forgiveness. "*Do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children.*" Jesus speaks words of judgment, and that judgment is for not receiving Him as who He is: The Christ who come for a singular purpose—to take away the sin of the world.

And boy do we have mockers aplenty. Our culture is full of them, but so is our church! The Word of God is clear on many, many things, especially about sin. But so many Christians know what the Bible says about sin, about forgiving one another, about selfless loving, about giving firstfruits of blessings back to God, about making peace with each other, admonishing one another, about sharing the Gospel of Jesus but then one way or another find a way to say, "Yeah, I know what the Bible says, but I think...blah, blah, blah, blah, blah..."

Is that so far from mocking, "If you are the King of the Jews, go ahead and come down and make me do it your way." Is it so different that the soldiers laughing and thinking they're the ones with the power right before the face of the King of Glory?

And we have revilers! I've met many, and probably even been one myself: someone who is suffering some sort of torment—financial, emotional, addictional, health and biological—and looked at God and shouted in self-righteous anger, "*Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!*" or actually, "Save me from this hardship because that's your job! I'm not so concerned about that whole cross and salvation thing!" God's Son dies and rises to give us perfect life forever and we only care about a few more broken days on dying planet earth.

We never learn. We misconstrue reality, think we're in the right and righteously knowing how things stand and how they should be, and we dictate that to God.

Thankfully, for the elect, God won't stand for it. He sends the Holy Spirit working through the hardships, through pastors and fellow Christians, through the Word cemented in our hearts as little children. "I am God. Jesus is Christ. I am Creator. You are my created. I am holy. You are sinner. I am love. You are saved." We recognize the Lord for who He is, for what He is. He is our Savior and our salvation. We are...pretty stupid and rebellious...He died to get us past that.

He is King. We remember that and pray, "Jesus, remember me in your kingdom."

And, thanks be to God, there is no uncertainty about His answer. In absolution: "You will be with me in paradise." In your Baptism, "You will be with me in paradise." In His body and blood, "You will be with me in paradise."

It's true, we just don't get it. That's our curse. But the curse is broken by the Christ who keeps on giving it in abundance. The Spirit keeps calling us to repentance, and from beyond the cross and tomb Jesus keeps answering, "Your sins are forgiven. Today you are made holy by my blood, and you will be with me in Paradise."

Amen.