

Christ the King Sunday

November 20, 2016

The Rev. Jamie Samilio

Do All the Good You Can...

This week at the staff meeting, I discovered that Denise and I had a similar message in our sermons last week—I preached at St. Paul's, and Denise preached here at Holy Cross. Both of us made the point that we need to love God, love our neighbors, and do justice. This message of love and justice has been running through Luke's Gospel for many weeks now.

So, imagine my surprise when I first read the Gospel for today. I had to ask myself, "Why is Jesus being crucified in the middle of November? Doesn't that happen just before Easter?"

Today is Christ the King Sunday, and it is a relatively recent addition to our calendar. It was instituted by Pope Pius XI in 1925, and we celebrate it on the final Sunday of what we call Ordinary time—the last Sunday before Advent—yes, Christmas is coming. But, first we remember Jesus's death and celebrate the day when we remember that Christ is the King of all of the Universe.

So, let's look at the Gospel—one interesting to note is that Luke is the only Gospel that addresses the criminals crucified with Jesus on this day. And, they have two very different takes on being hung on either side of the man they called the King of the Jews.

Biblical commentator Gilberto Ruiz said of this Gospel, "We have been walking with Luke since Pentecost on a journey that takes Jesus to Jerusalem for the culmination of his ministry. His death on the cross is the last act of obedience that he completes, in order to bridge the gap between sinful man and a loving and reliable God.

Despite his own agony and the overwhelming temptation to save himself from this pain and humiliation, Jesus opens the door to paradise to one of the criminals dying with him."*

Jesus has never been about proving his power. He is all about living by example. And that is clear in the compassion He shows for those who are doing the crucifying in the Gospel when he says, "Father forgive them for they know not what they have done."

One criminal being crucified with him gets it. One is accountable for his actions and acknowledges that his crucifixion is justified because of his crimes. One criminal gets it, and then asks, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

One criminal wanted what would fix his world right now, the other asked that his soul be saved forever. What happens to the other criminal? What happens to us when we are so filled with self-righteousness, that we cannot not see what we are doing, and we will not ask for forgiveness?

The line in the Gospel called out to Jesus, "Save yourself" has been the basis of the adage, "physician heal thyself." In my case, "priest, forgive thyself" might be the term, but I know a little something about being blind to my own harmful words and actions. In a world so filled with an overwhelming wave of information, immediacy, and desire for instant gratification it is easy to overlook the impact we have on others. Especially when we are just trying to keep our own heads above water and provide for our families. We keep just doing the next thing in front of us, and what we need to do, is slow down, contemplate the impact of our actions. Then, make a choice to

do the next right thing in front of us, intentionally, and following the guide of loving God, loving our neighbors, and doing justice. Only Christ had the character to put himself last, even while humanly asking that if this cup could pass him by, he would be ok with that. Jesus, instead of showing power, shows compassion. And showing compassion over wielding power is something that I think the world needs more of, right now.

Our sin is not what keeps us from God. (2x) Our problem lies in our inability to receive God's love, freely given, and then repent and change.

"Father forgive them for they know not what they have done." was a compassionate response from the King of the Universe toward those who would crucify Him.

Only one of the thieves repented in the end. And Jeremiah seems to tell of what will happen when we fail to love and do justice, "...Woe is the one who scatters the sheep...I will attend to you for your evil doings. "The Lord is our righteousness."

Standing in the Guggenheim museum one night a patron was taking in a work by Jackson Pollock. The patron standing near a guard, said "That is nothing special, I could have done the same with a few cans of paint myself." The guard felt compelled to reply said, "Sir, the painting is not on trial, your taste in art is on trial. That painting has stood the test of time." Like the painting, our lives are held up to the law. The law of that time or this time, God's law or mans law, we find ourselves judged. We begin to see who we really are. The bad news is that in this life, there are no innocent people. We are all guilty of sins of omission and commission. **

Many people are very upset about the outcome of the election, about the disenfranchised and marginalized populations everywhere, about the Dakota Pipeline, it seems like there is something unjust going on at every turn. There will be trouble always in the world somewhere for someone. But in the face of adversity, this is not a time for us to be mocking and offering others sour wine. We can only control our words and our actions, and we need to select those words and actions carefully, and measure them against the principle of love for God and each other.

The people of God have to use their influence, use their words, and show through actions love of God and neighbor, and not wield some power over those who oppose our views, in an attempt to force them into compliance with our beliefs. We simply need to lead the way to love.

For those of you who attended the series on Forgiveness that Denise and I lead, you know that there is a difference between forgiving someone and letting them off the hook. If we are to follow in the social justice footsteps of Jesus, then we need to forgive our bothers and sisters, but we should not tolerate hate-speak, abuse of power, or injustice. We should refuse to accept what is going on as the new normal!

Jesus can redeem anybody and He will if you accept him, and the words of the Canticle support this, "To give people knowledge of salvation by the forgiveness of their sins. In the tender compassion of our God the dawn from on high shall break upon us..."

These are very hopeful words, but for redemption, are you willing, to change the plan? Willing to accept the consequences of your actions and recognize that you will have to pay for them?

More than ever, as individuals in relationship with God, each other and the world, we need reconciliation. Reconciliation for our own sins, and reconciliation with each other over the political divide we are experiencing in our country. But it all starts with us.

Like the criminal crucified with Christ, we need to recognize and be accountable for our wrongdoing, and then we need to ask for forgiveness. Forgiveness will not be denied, there will be a

place for us in the kingdom, and everlasting life with Christ in paradise. But we must change, we must be accountable, and we must ask for forgiveness.

One of the first things that Ron Parnell, our Senior Warden, said to me when I arrived at Holy Cross was that he appreciated the Episcopal Church and especially Holy Cross, because we do not check our brains outside the church door. We are a thinking parish and denomination. And that means that when you leave here, be mindful of your words and actions. Think before you speak. Be accountable, and mindful of your words and actions, and make sure what you say and do supports loving God, loving your neighbors, and upholding justice in the world.

Pray for your enemies, pray for each other, pray for yourself—pray!

I love one particular anonymous quote, that I have shared with you before, but it bears repeating:

Be careful of your thoughts, for your thoughts become your words.

Be careful of your words, for your words become your actions.

Be careful of your actions, because your actions shape your character.

Be careful of your character, for your character will determine your destiny.

Finally, I will leave you with the words from Methodist founder John Wesley, “Do all the good you can, for all the people you can, in all the ways you can, as long as ever you can.” Amen.

* The Rev. Liz Tomlinson

** Adapted and paraphrased from The Communicator’s Commentary: Luke, by Bruce Larson.

Gilberto Ruiz: <https://www.workingpreacher.org/>