

Christ the King C
Luke 23:33-43
November 20, 2016

Since Halloween Owen has been asking if it was Christmas yet. The first couple of times I reminded him that there were a couple of holidays that happen before it is Christmas time. Remember Owen? First, we have mommy's birthday (a national holiday in our house) then we celebrate Thanksgiving and *then* it's Christmas. Satisfied with the answer, he resumed his previous play. But the question about Christmas continues to come up and while it is endearing for a little one to ask about Christmas my answers got shorter and shorter each time.

Is it Christmas yet? Not yet Owen, mommy's birthday, then Thanksgiving, then Christmas. He'd ask again. Birthday, Thanksgiving, Christmas. Again and again he would ask until my response had whittled down to, "No Owen. Cake. Turkey. Tree."

That last answer seems to have captured his attention the most. The question has not been raised since. Three of his favorite things promised a guaranteed order. Now it's, "is it time for cake?"

I'm sure he's excited to see the lights and decorations. I should admit I am ready for some Christmas cheer myself. We can't help but be a bit anxious and excited as this time of year comes around. There is a great deal to look forward to and anticipate.

But before the table is made this Thursday, before the stores open their doors at some ungodly hour, and before the evergreen gets cut down from the hillside and loaded onto the roof of the car, a different kind of tree gets shoved into a posthole on a hillside while the echoes of pounding hammers and iron nails still echo through the city streets.

Even though it comes around every year, this day in the church year still catches us by surprise. The Word we hear today is the last thing we expect hear so close to holidays marked by thanks and giving. Calvary's hill is the last place we expect to find the one for

whom this Sunday is named. Christ the King. A king dying on a cross. And yet what we hear and what we find today is exactly what I think our bruised and anxious hearts need today: a solemn reminder of the incredible power and amazing grace of our God.

The story told again today of our God who chooses to take on our flesh and die our death so that we need not fear our tomorrow. It is with this bold confidence that the second criminal turns to Jesus and utters his well-known words turned Taize prayer: Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”

Keep in mind that to the criminal and the rest of the crowd gathered at the foot of the cross there was no resurrection yet. While we know the story wasn't finished yet, the end certainly seemed very near. The apparent reality is that this king, that his kingdom, and all his power was coming to an end. After all, that was the purpose of Jesus' execution.

It is precisely while they were dying next to each other that the man has the faith to see and believe that Jesus is the one who will rule as king, even if death loomed close by. He has the faith to see and believe that this dying king can remember him. And he trusts that remembering means something.

Remember – a powerful word in the Gospel of Luke. It's used only a handful of times throughout the book and each time it means a great deal more than a fleeting thought popping into one's head.

- In the songs of Mary and Zechariah in chapter one, God remembers God's promises to Abraham and his descendants and acts to fulfill them through the birth of Jesus.
- In a parable in chapter 16, Abraham tells the rich man to remember how he acted during his life. To remember how he treated others harshly while living in luxury and to consider what living in community really looks like.
- In chapter 24, two men in dazzling clothes tell the women at the empty tomb to remember what Jesus had commanded

them: go spread the news of the resurrection. Immediately the left and did it.

- Finally, at the table in the Upper Room, while lifting bread and wine, Jesus tells the disciples to do these things in remembrance of him.

With remembering comes action. Remember and do.

Throughout the witness of scripture when God remembers, God acts. The criminal on the cross next to Jesus isn't just asking that Jesus think about him for a moment, but to respond with action to those thoughts.

Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom. Remember me, the criminal who has messed up. Remember me, the one for whom this death is just. Remember me, even as you hang here too. It takes a great act of faith to confess our sinfulness, our crimes, and our guilt, to the sinless, guiltless Jesus. Then to trust that the response, the action, the result of remembering, would be something good for us. On this Christ the King Sunday, we gather to bear witness once again that the something of the cross is very good indeed.

Jesus proclaims to the repentant one, "Today you will be with me in paradise." Not soon. Not eventually. Not maybe. Today. It is another word for Luke like remember. Used sparingly but important when it appears.

- Today in the town of David a Savior has been born. (2:11)
- Today the scripture is fulfilled in your hearing. (4:21)
- I must stay at your house today. (19:5)
- Today salvation has come to this house. (19:9)
- I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise. (23:43)

Every single time what happened "today" is seeing or hearing Jesus – is experiencing Christ's very presence. It is seeing and hearing that in Jesus the Christ there is hope, there is life, there is salvation. At this

font and table we see and touch and taste the ways Jesus remembers. We witness how God has remembered and acted for our good. Our baptismal call beckons us out of our tombs. This meal nourishes our bodies and unites us as one community. We are made members of the body of Christ, the kingdom of God. It happens here and now. It happens today.

The Kingdom of God is here. Paradise is now. My brothers and sisters, you have been called, you have been claimed, and you have been redeemed. Today you have been remembered. And don't you forget it!