



April 18 – Good Friday

“Jesus, remember me...” These are haunting words. We may not always hear them as such. When sung during Holy Communion they seem comforting. In this context, spoken by a criminal next to Jesus, hanging on a cross, they are haunting words. This person is worried and asks Jesus not to forget him as he enters into his kingdom.

I would guess that most of us in this room have had a similar thought at some point. Jesus, remember me. Will I be able to join you in heaven? How do I know? The truth is that it is human nature to doubt. We want to know. The easiest way to know is to draw a line, to decide who for sure would be out. If that is not us, then we must be in. There are a lot of churches that use this as a marketing strategy. These churches paint a picture of God’s judgement on others so that you feel like you must belong, you must be in. This is all inward focused. Am I in? If so, any further action is optional.

This text challenges that attitude. Jesus says “Forgive them, for they know not what they do.” Who is the “them”? Do “they” include Pilate who knows the right thing to do but is swayed by the crowd? Does “them” include the soldiers who mocked Jesus? Does it include those who are carrying out the orders of execution, those who nailed him to the cross? Those who can hide behind the excuse of “we were just following orders.” Does it include the chief priests and other temple authorities? These are the ones who led the charge, pushing for crucifixion. Those who were afraid of the loss of prestige and social standing.

Was it the crowd that was gathered there at the trial? Was it those who were caught up in the mob mentality and yelled “Crucify Him!” Was it the followers of Jesus who were standing at a distance, trying not to be seen? Was it those who were afraid of a similar fate?

Was it those who remained silent while atrocities were happening around them? Was it those who refused to step up and challenge those in power? Was it those who had tricked Judas? Was it the Roman Empire?

The text does not tell us who the “them” is as Jesus prays. I believe that is because the answer to all of these questions is yes. Yes, it is Pilate, the soldiers, the guards, the crucifers...yes, yes, yes, yes, and yes.

Who is “them?” The truth is that it is all of us. It is all of humanity. All of us fall short. All of us are part of a fallen humanity. When placed in the same situation, we would have been the same cast of characters surrounding Jesus death. It breaks my heart to think of Jesus, carrying the weight of all of humanity, and saying, “Forgive them, for they know not what they are doing.”

This is an unimaginable love.... a wondrous love, that leads Jesus to the cross. And while there, he is still welcoming others, saying to the person hanging next to him, “I tell you today, you will be with me in paradise.” There is nothing mentioned that would make this person “worthy.” He is not a churchgoer. He has some flaws. If there was someone the world would point to and say, “this person is out!”, it would be this man. Jesus says, “Welcome home.”

There is a line in the Lorax, by Dr. Suess, which says, “Unless someone cares an awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It’s not.” In the book, there is a seed that is planted that brings new life. It brings back the trees. It brings back creation.

Jesus takes all our brokenness and then plants a seed of new life. Instead of thinking of Jesus being buried, I like to think of love being planted. Like anything that is planted, we have to wait for it to sprout and then nurture its growth. Tonight, we gather around the cross. We hear Jesus words, “Forgive them.” We hear of his death. Love is planted. Now we wait...

Pastor Michael Schmidt