

“Remember Me”

Meditation Preached by The Rev. Jennifer Cameron

Good Friday, April 2, 2021 – St. Columba Presbyterian Church, Belleville

Hymns for Worship Video – April 2, 2021

“Jesus, Remember Me” #206 in the Book of Praise (3 times)

Jesus, remember me

When you come into your kingdom

Jesus, remember me

When you come into your kingdom

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“When I Survey the Wondrous Cross” #231 in the Book of Praise Vv. 1 - 4

V. 1 When I survey the wondrous cross

On which the Prince of glory died

My richest gain I count but loss

And pour contempt on all my pride

V. 2 Forbid it Lord that I should boast

Save in the death of Christ my God

All the vain things that charm me most

I sacrifice them to His blood

V. 3 See from His head His hands His feet

Sorrow and love flow mingled down

Did ever such love and sorrow meet

Or thorns compose so rich a crown

V. 4 Were the whole realm of nature mine

That were an offering far too small

Love so amazing so divine

Demands my soul my life my all

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“Beneath the Cross of Jesus” #238 in the Book of Praise Vv. 1 - 3

V. 1 Beneath the cross of Jesus

I fain would take my stand

The shadow of a mighty rock

Within a weary land

A home within the wilderness

A rest upon the way

From the burning of the noontide heat

And the burden of the day

V. 2 Upon the cross of Jesus
 Mine eyes at times can see
 The very dying form of One
 Who suffered there for me
 And from my smitten heart with tears
 Two wonders I confess
 The wonder of redeeming love
 And my unworthiness

V. 3 I take O cross thy shadow
 For my abiding place
 I ask no other sunshine than
 The sunshine of His face
 Content to let the world go by
 To know no gain nor loss
 My sinful self my only shame
 My glory all the cross

Elizabeth Cecilia Clephane | Frederick Charles Maker

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Scripture Texts: Luke 22:63-71

⁶³ Now the men who were holding Jesus began to mock him and beat him; ⁶⁴ they also blindfolded him and kept asking him, “Prophecy! Who is it that struck you?” ⁶⁵ They kept heaping many other insults on him.

⁶⁶ When day came, the assembly of the elders of the people, both chief priests and scribes, gathered together, and they brought him to their council. ⁶⁷ They said, “If you are the Messiah, tell us.” He replied, “If I tell you, you will not believe; ⁶⁸ and if I question you, you will not answer. ⁶⁹ But from now on the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the power of God.” ⁷⁰ All of them asked, “Are you, then, the Son of God?” He said to them, “You say that I am.” ⁷¹ Then they said, “What further testimony do we need? We have heard it ourselves from his own lips!”

Luke 23:1-12

Then the assembly rose as a body and brought Jesus before Pilate. ² They began to accuse him, saying, “We found this man perverting our nation, forbidding us to pay taxes to the emperor, and saying that he himself is the Messiah, a king.” ³ Then Pilate asked him, “Are you the king of the Jews?” He answered, “You say so.” ⁴ Then Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowds, “I find no basis for an accusation against this man.” ⁵ But they were insistent and said, “He stirs up the people by teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee where he began even to this place.”

⁶ When Pilate heard this, he asked whether the man was a Galilean. ⁷ And when he learned that he was under Herod’s jurisdiction, he sent him off to Herod, who was himself in Jerusalem at that time. ⁸ When Herod saw Jesus, he was very glad, for he had been wanting to see him for a long time, because he had heard about him and was hoping to see him perform some sign. ⁹ He questioned him at some length, but Jesus gave him no answer. ¹⁰ The chief priests and the scribes

stood by, vehemently accusing him. ¹¹ Even Herod with his soldiers treated him with contempt and mocked him; then he put an elegant robe on him, and sent him back to Pilate. ¹² That same day Herod and Pilate became friends with each other; before this they had been enemies.

Luke 23:13-43

¹³ Pilate then called together the chief priests, the leaders, and the people, ¹⁴ and said to them, “You brought me this man as one who was perverting the people; and here I have examined him in your presence and have not found this man guilty of any of your charges against him. ¹⁵ Neither has Herod, for he sent him back to us. Indeed, he has done nothing to deserve death. ¹⁶ I will therefore have him flogged and release him.”

¹⁸ Then they all shouted out together, “Away with this fellow! Release Barabbas for us!” ¹⁹ (This was a man who had been put in prison for an insurrection that had taken place in the city, and for murder.) ²⁰ Pilate, wanting to release Jesus, addressed them again; ²¹ but they kept shouting, “Crucify, crucify him!” ²² A third time he said to them, “Why, what evil has he done? I have found in him no ground for the sentence of death; I will therefore have him flogged and then release him.” ²³ But they kept urgently demanding with loud shouts that he should be crucified; and their voices prevailed. ²⁴ So Pilate gave his verdict that their demand should be granted. ²⁵ He released the man they asked for, the one who had been put in prison for insurrection and murder, and he handed Jesus over as they wished.

²⁶ As they led him away, they seized a man, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming from the country, and they laid the cross on him, and made him carry it behind Jesus. ²⁷ A great number of the people followed him, and among them were women who were beating their breasts and wailing for him. ²⁸ But Jesus turned to them and said, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. ²⁹ For the days are surely coming when they will say, ‘Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never nursed.’ ³⁰ Then they will begin to say to the mountains, ‘Fall on us’; and to the hills, ‘Cover us.’ ³¹ For if they do this when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?”

³² Two others also, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. ³³ When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. [[³⁴ Then Jesus said, “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.”]] And they cast lots to divide his clothing. ³⁵ And the people stood by, watching; but the leaders scoffed at him, saying, “He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!” ³⁶ The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine, ³⁷ and saying, “If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!” ³⁸ There was also an inscription over him, “This is the King of the Jews.”

³⁹ One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, “Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!” ⁴⁰ But the other rebuked him, saying, “Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? ⁴¹ And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong.” ⁴² Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” ⁴³ He replied, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.”

Meditation

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

In going through some old files, I recently discovered a Good Friday bulletin insert produced by the Presbyterian Church in Canada a number of years ago. Under the heading “Finding Meaning in the Tradition,” it reads:

“On this dark day, we need not pretend that we don’t know that Jesus will be raised. But giving the events their own day reminds us that new life comes at great cost and by way of a cross – this cross. In the same way baptism is not just about rising with Christ, but dying and rising with him. Part of our baptismal identity is given to us today, giving us the courage to face the pain, suffering and injustice in our lives and in our world. Seeing those things through the Good Friday story, we glimpse the promise of Easter.”

This is indeed a dark day. It began last night with betrayal and continues this morning with suffering and death. It’s exhausting. Every year there is such a build up to the events of last Sunday, yesterday evening, today and Sunday. It’s an emotional roller coaster – Jesus enters the city to cries of joy and praise, he is betrayed by a disciple as he eats the Passover with his closest circle of friends, he is arrested, unjustly tried, sentenced, put through an agonizing death, and buried in a tomb meant for someone else. Then, just when it feels like we can start resting from the fatigue and grief of this week, we awaken to the news of the Resurrection and we are back to joyful praise and cries of Hallelujah! Just thinking about it is enough to wear us out.

But, as I often say about serving God through the church, it’s a good exhaustion. It’s meaningful. The fact that we have paid enough attention to how Jesus paid the price for our sinfulness that we are weary from the experience means we have not only heard the story but embraced it. We have become a part of the story. We have traveled with Jesus, waited with him, been afraid for him. We have waited for the verdict to be given and sentencing to be pronounced. We are shaken and horrified as we witness the beatings, the insults, and the driving of the nails. We are heartbroken as he is lifted up on his cross to die. All for us. All for sinners. All for those who love him and call him Lord, no matter how often we are also a part of the betrayal and denial and abandonment. We persevere through it because we know what it means, as much as our human minds can possibly understand it. Our hearts understand more than our minds can explain. We persevere because we go through it all in the light of hope that this is not all there is to the story.

Every year the story affects us. There are so many moments that touch us deeply, some that speak directly to where we are at this time in our lives, some that speak to our loved ones’ situations, some that may speak more boldly to us than they have before. As I prepare worship for these special days at the heart of the church, I am always amazed at how new it feels every year. I have been preaching on these texts for almost thirty years, and it never gets old. It doesn’t become routine. Every year is new, and most years something speaks to me in a way it hasn’t before, or at least not for a long time. This year it is one phrase, two words, uttered by two very different people.

Remember me.

Jesus said it on Thursday evening as he shared the Passover meal with his disciples, as he gave them, and us, the sacrament, and showed us how to remember him. As often as you drink of it, *remember me*.

Then, a criminal, hanging on a cross beside our crucified Lord, utters the same phrase as he chastises another crucified criminal for mocking Jesus. Jesus, *remember me* when you come into your kingdom. Remember me.

Two different scenarios. Two different people. Two different reasons for speaking these words. But both very powerful. Both worth remembering.

When Jesus told his disciples to remember him, he wanted them to remember all that he was, all that he had come for, all that he had taught them. Then, and they didn't know this part yet, he wanted them to remember him as they understood him after his resurrection. They were to remember him, remember what he had taught them, remember what he had done for them, and teach it to those that would hear them preach and teach in their much fuller knowledge of his purpose and promise. He wanted them to remember their teacher, as their Master who died, and as the risen Lord. Then, they were to remember him for all people, and teach us who he was, who he is, and that he is to come again.

The criminal hanging next to him, suffering because of his own actions, also wanted to be remembered, but in his case he wanted Jesus to remember him. He wanted to Jesus to remember that he knew who he was, that he knew Jesus was the victim of injustice, and that Jesus could forgive him where human authorities could not. Jesus, remember me, he says. Remember me when all is said and done and you claim your own as your own. Forever.

Jesus is declared innocent three times in the whole ordeal. Pilate says he can't find anything Jesus has done wrong. The criminal on the cross says Jesus has done nothing wrong. The Roman centurion at the foot of the cross says Jesus is innocent. And then the Temple curtain is torn in two, a sign of mourning, while people beat their breasts in grief as they make their way home. Why then, does Jesus die? Why does Pilate go ahead with the dreaded verdict?

From Pilate's perspective the threat to Rome must be neutralized. From the crowd's perspective, Jesus must pay for the disappointment they feel. In the eyes of those who condemn him, this is justice.

But this is not God's idea of justice. "This is not God's definition of justice. God's justice does not seek punishment or ensure 'peace' through violence and abuse of power. This is the lesson of the crucifixion. The cross is the ultimate paradox: divine power displayed through weakness, justice achieved through an innocent victim's willingness to suffer, so that **through** death, new life could illuminate a dark world."¹

God's justice is powerful. So powerful that it is willing to take on death as its ultimate opponent. "The two greatest commandments are to love God and love our neighbour as

¹ Workingpreacher.org... Resources for the Narrative Lectionary, April 2, 2021, written by Michal Beth Dinkler, Assistant Professor of New Testament, Yale Divinity School, New Haven, Conn.

ourselves (Luke 10:26-28; see also Matthew 22:38-39). Love for God, neighbour, and self will never justify injustice. Real authority—true power—always walks with people through death all the way into new life; it never stops on the cross or in the tomb.”² Even Jesus’ final words from the cross speak to God’s power to intervene: *Father, into your hands I commend my spirit*. He would not have said this had there not been hope that God would continue to work, and to overcome the injustice of the cross – for all. God’s justice is powerful, and merciful. “In God’s kingdom, no one ‘deserves’ payback or retribution because no one is abusing power or taking advantage of anyone else.”³

Unfortunately, there are still too many unjust crosses in our world. People are dehumanized by racism, abuse, prejudices that create all kinds of excuses for mistreating people. But this is not the message of the cross. The church has a tremendous burden of responsibility to make sure the right message gets out into the world – God’s message – Christ’s message. The cross of Christ proclaims a message of hope in the midst of injustice. We, the church must preach that hope, the way of the cross that is hope. “Over and against the dehumanizing violence and injustice of the world, may we proclaim... the way of the cross—the merciful, just, and powerful way of Christ.”⁴ For in Jesus’ physical weakness, his spiritual strength proclaimed hope that God would receive his Spirit and keep moving forward to overcome what the Son of God had absorbed, in the injustice of the cross.

On this dark, dark day, there is light. The cross is not the end. Death is not the end. The grave is not the end. As much as Jesus wants us to remember him, in his sacrifice he remembered us. Perhaps this quote from a professor at Yale Divinity School can reinforce this hope: “Dust and rocks groan. Deserts and prairies weep. Bushes and trees moan. Rivers and oceans roar. Animals of land, sea, and sky recoil. Sun cowers and moon wanes. Humanity fails. And darkness laughs. But it will not have its way with us forever.”⁵
Amen.

Luke 23:44-56

⁴⁴ It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, ⁴⁵ while the sun’s light failed; and the curtain of the temple was torn in two. ⁴⁶ Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.” Having said this, he breathed his last. ⁴⁷ When the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God and said, “Certainly this man was innocent.” ⁴⁸ And when all the crowds who had gathered there for this spectacle saw what had taken place, they returned home, beating their breasts. ⁴⁹ But all his acquaintances, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.

⁵⁰ Now there was a good and righteous man named Joseph, who, though a member of the council, ⁵¹ had not agreed to their plan and action. He came from the Jewish town of Arimathea,

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

and he was waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God. ⁵²This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. ⁵³Then he took it down, wrapped it in a linen cloth, and laid it in a rock-hewn tomb where no one had ever been laid. ⁵⁴It was the day of Preparation, and the sabbath was beginning. ⁵⁵The women who had come with him from Galilee followed, and they saw the tomb and how his body was laid. ⁵⁶Then they returned, and prepared spices and ointments. On the sabbath they rested according to the commandment.