

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 20, 2022  
CHRIST THE KING SUNDAY  
LUKE 23:33-43  
TRADITIONAL

I LIKE TO WATCH BRITISH DRAMAS ON TV AND HAVE BEEN CAPTIVE TO SHOWS LIKE DOWNTON ABBEY AND THE CROWN. SEASON 4 OF THE CROWN DEPICTS PEOPLE IN ELITE BRITISH SOCIETY WHO WERE EXTREMELY DISPLEASED WITH THE DIRECTION OF THE COUNTRY AND THE PRIME MINISTER AT THE TIME, MARGARET THATCHER. SO MUCH SO THAT HER OWN PARTY BEGAN ORCHESTRATING A COUP IN ORDER TO OUST HER AND CHANGE LEADERSHIP.

SUCH THINGS HAPPEN BECAUSE AS HUMAN BEINGS, WE TEND TO PROJECT UPON OUR POLITICAL LEADERS AND SYSTEMS OUR HOPES AND DREAMS AND HATREDS AND FEARS.

THIS PROMPTED SINGER DEREK WEBB TO WRITE A SONG WHERE HE TALKS ABOUT “LOOKING FOR A SAVIOR ON CAPITOL HILL.

THIS IS OUR TENDENCY. WHICH IS WHY WE OBSERVE CHRIST THE KING SUNDAY TODAY. IT ALWAYS COMES AT THE END OF THE LITURGICAL YEAR ON THE LAST SUNDAY OF THE SEASON OF PENTECOST.

AND BELIEVE IT OR NOT, IT’S A RELATIVELY NEW DATE ON THE CHURCH CALENDAR. YOUR ANCESTORS WOULD NOT HAVE KNOWN IT BECAUSE IT WAS PUT ON THE CALENDAR IN THE MID-20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY BY LEADERS WHO RECOGNIZED THE NEED FOR A REMINDER THAT HUMAN POLITICAL SYSTEMS ALWAYS FALL SHORT.

AT THE BEGINNING OF THE 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY, THE UNITED STATES WAS EXPERIENCING THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION ALONG WITH UNHEARD LEVELS OF PROSPERITY AND ADVANCEMENT. PEOPLE THOUGHT THE 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY WAS GOING TO BE GREAT, BUT THEN WE HAD THIS THING CALLED THE FIRST WORLD WAR. WE DIDN’T CALL IT THE FIRST WORLD WAR THEN, AND WE THOUGHT WE GOT IT OUT OF OUR SYSTEM. BUT SADLY, 20 YEARS LATER, WE DID IT AGAIN – EVEN BIGGER – THE SECOND WORLD WAR.

SO, THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH, FOLLOWED QUICKLY BY ALMOST ALL MAINLINE DENOMINATIONS, SAID, “WE NEED TO PUT SOMETHING IN THE CHURCH CALENDAR TO REMIND BELIEVERS THAT OUR HOPE IS **NOT** IN EARTHLY SYSTEMS OF POLITICAL POWER.

IDEALLY, I WISH WE CELEBRATED THIS ON THE SUNDAY BEFORE ELECTIONS. WE NEED THE REMINDER THAT CHRIST ALONE IS KING OF KINGS, LORD OF LORDS AND PRINCE OF PEACE.

THIS DAY, CHRIST THE KING SUNDAY, REMINDS US NOT TO PUT ALL OF OUR HOPES INTO THE PEOPLE AND SYSTEMS THAT ARE BOUND TO LET US DOWN ON SOME LEVEL. SO WHEN POLITICAL DEBATES HEAT UP AROUND THE THANKSGIVING TABLE, YOU CAN JUST SAY, "JESUS IS KING, I'M GONNA GO GET MORE PIE."

EVERYONE KNOWS THERE IS AN UNWRITTEN LUTHERAN RULE THAT THE CHRISTMAS DECORATIONS DON'T GO UP UNTIL THE BEGINNING OF ADVENT, OR AT LEAST UNTIL AFTER THANKSGIVING. YET HERE WE ARE, SOME OF US, WITH OUR TREES AND LIGHTS IN OUR LIVING ROOMS. STARBUCKS HAS ALREADY REPLACED PUMPKIN SPICE WITH PEPPERMINT LATTES, AND YOU COME TO CHURCH THINKING YOU'RE GOING TO GET A WHIFF OF CHRISTMAS, BUT INSTEAD, THE GOSPEL READING GIVES US GOOD FRIDAY.

THAT'S WHAT WE HEARD IN LUKE 23. THEY GOT TO THE PLACE OF THE SKULL AND THERE THEY CRUCIFIED HIM. IT'S NOT WHAT WE EXPECT TO HEAR TODAY, BUT IT'S WHAT ALL OF US NEED TO HEAR. BECAUSE SO MANY PEOPLE I KNOW ARE CARRYING A TREMENDOUS AMOUNT OF PAIN.

FINANCIAL PAIN..JOB-RELATED PAIN..PHYSICAL PAIN.. PAIN FROM THE PAST.. THE PAIN OF STRAINED RELATIONSHIPS AND UNFULFILLED EXPECTATIONS.

MANY PEOPLE WILL FEEL LONELIER AND MORE DEPRESSED BEFORE AND AFTER CHRISTMAS THAN AT ANY OTHER TIME OF THE YEAR. SO WHY THIS TEXT ON THIS DAY?

LUKE IS SHOWING US, BY WAY OF THE CROSS, HOW GOD WORKS MOST CLEARLY, MOST PROFOUNDLY IN SUFFERING. THIS IS A WORD WE ALL NEED TO HEAR. BECAUSE SO MANY OF US WERE TAUGHT THAT GOD WORKS IN OUR SUCCESSES OUR ACHIEVEMENTS, THE BRIGHT AND SHINY INSTAGRAM MOMENTS OF OUR LIVES.

BUT WHAT LUKE SAYS IS THAT GOD WORKS IN THE DARK, GOD WORKS IN THE DEFEATS, GOD WORKS IN THE LOSSES AND IN THE SUFFERING. BOTH HIS AND YOURS.

AS JESUS HUNG ON THE CROSS, THE CROWD JEERED. THE SOLDIERS MOCKED. A THIEF HANGING BESIDE HIM DERIDED THE LORD.

BUT IT'S THE OTHER CRIMINAL, THE ONE ON THE OPPOSITE SIDE WHO SAYS THE IMPOSSIBLE THING. AND I JUST WANT YOU TO SEE HOW CRAZY IT IS FOR HIM TO SAY "JESUS, REMEMBER ME WHEN YOU COME INTO YOUR KINGDOM." JESUS, AS YOU HANG THERE BLEEDING AND SUFFERING UNTHINKABLE AGONE, REMEMBER ME WHEN YOU COME INTO YOUR KINGDOM.

THIS THIEF, YOU SEE, KNOWS WHAT WE NEED TO KNOW, WHICH IS THAT GOD WORKS IN HIS SUFFERING AND DEATH **FOR YOU**.

SO LET'S CONSIDER HIS REQUEST FOR A MOMENT. WE ALL KNOW WHAT IT'S LIKE TO BE REMEMBERED, AND WE KNOW WHAT IT'S LIKE TO BE FORGOTTEN. THINK FOR A MOMENT OF A TIME WHEN YOU WERE REMEMBERED, WHAT HAPPENED, HOW IT FELT.

MAYBE IT WAS A PHONE CALL, A LETTER, A VISIT, A GIFT, A SIMPLE WORD. MAYBE IT WAS A SURPRISE. MAYBE IT WAS AS SIMPLE AS SOMEONE RECOGNIZING YOU, LOOKING YOU IN THE EYES AND CALLING YOU BY NAME.

REGARDLESS OF WHAT IT WAS OR HOW IT CAME ABOUT, IT BROUGHT YOU SOME SENSE OF LIFE, HEALING, AND WHOLENESS.

WE ALL WANT TO BE REMEMBERED. IT MEANS THAT WE MATTER, WE BELONG. WHEN WE ARE REMEMBERED, SOMEONE ELSE BEARS WITNESS TO THIS. THAT'S WHY IN MOST LUTHERAN CHURCHES, WE REMEMBER BY NAME ON ALL SAINTS SUNDAY, THOSE WHO HAVE GONE BEFORE US IN THE PAST YEAR.

SEE, IN MOMENTS OF BEING REMEMBERED, WE ARE KNOWN. WE ARE ALIVE, AND WE ARE HEALED.

NOW THINK ABOUT A TIME WHEN YOU WERE FORGOTTEN. WHAT DID THAT FEEL LIKE? HAVE YOU EVER SAT IN A RESTAURANT WAITING FOR SOMEONE WHO **DIDN'T** SHOW UP? HOW ABOUT THAT PERSON THAT LOOKS AT YOU, BEGINS TO SPEAK, AND YOU REALIZE THEY HAVE NO IDEA WHO YOU ARE OR WHAT YOUR NAME IS?

MAYBE SOMEONE IMPORTANT TO YOU FORGOT YOUR BIRTHDAY, OR THE ANNIVERSARY OF YOUR WEDDING, OR THE DEATH OF A LOVED ONE. IN THOSE MOMENTS WE MAY FEEL ALONE, ABANDONED, UNCERTAIN, WOUNDED – MAYBE EVEN ANGRY.

NO ONE WANTS TO BE FORGOTTEN. WHETHER WE SPEAK IT ALOUD OR NOT, OUR CRY IS TO BE REMEMBERED.

AND BIBLICALLY, WHEN JESUS "REMEMBERS" SOMEONE, IT IS MORE THAN JUST THINKING ABOUT THEM. WHEN JESUS RE-MEMBERS YOU, HE IS LITERALLY PUTTING YOU BACK TOGETHER.

TO BE RE-MEMBERED IS TO BE MADE WHOLE. THEREFORE THE OPPOSITE OF RE-MEMBERING IS **DIS-MEMBEIRNG**; IT IS SEPARATION, AND BEING PULLING APART BY SHAME AND GUILT AND DISTRACTION, TO BE PULLED APART BY OUR COMPETING WANTS AND DESIRES.

THE THIEF ON THE CROSS WANTS TO BE RE-MEMBERED, PUT BACK TOGETHER AGAIN. AND NOTICE WHAT JESUS DOES NOT SAY HERE. HE DOESN'T SAY, "*I'LL THINK ABOUT YOU WHEN I'M IN PARADISE. I'LL THINK ABOUT THIS DAY. I'LL THINK HOW TRAGIC AND SAD YOUR LIFE IS.*"

WHAT GOOD WOULD THAT DO?

THIS THIEF NEEDS MORE. WE NEED MORE. BECAUSE WE'VE BEEN DIS-MEMBERED. WHAT I MEAN IS THAT PIECES OF OUR LIVES HAVE BEEN SCATTERED AND LOST...

SOMETIMES IT HAPPENS THROUGH THE CIRCUMSTANCES THAT WE FACE. IT HAPPENS THROUGH LOSS AND GRIEF, THROUGH SHATTERED DREAMS, AND DISAPPOINTMENTS AND REGRETS... AND THROUGH FAILURES WE DON'T DARE TALK ABOUT.

AND WHEN OUR LIVES BECOMES FRAGMENTED AND BROKEN, WE CAN EASILY **BECOME THIEVES**. WE TAKE WHAT IS NOT OURS. WE DIS-MEMBER OTHERS' LIVES IN AN ATTEMPT TO PUT OUR OWN BACK TOGETHER AGAIN.

THIS HAPPENS THROUGH ANGER AND RESENTMENT, THROUGH CRITICISM AND ACCUSATORY JUDGMENT.

IT HAPPENS THROUGH ENVY, COMPARISON AND COMPETITION, THROUGH GOSSIP, AND BAD MOUTHING OUR NEIGHBORS.

DIS-MEMBERING HAPPENS THROUGH PERFECTIONISM, THE NEED TO BE RIGHT OR IN CONTROL. IT HAPPENS THROUGH OUR BUSYNESS, THROUGH EXCESSIVE PRODUCTIVITY AND EFFICIENCY.

LOOK AT YOUR RELATIONSHIPS. WHEREVER THERE IS STRAIN, HURT, OR BROKENNESS, CHANCES ARE THAT YOU OR ANOTHER ARE BEING DIS-MEMBERED, FORGOTTEN, TORN APART.

THIS IS NOT THE LIFE THAT GOD GAVE US AT CREATION WHEN HE LOOKED ALL THAT HE HAD MADE, INCLUDING US, AND DECLARED, "IT IS GOOD."

SOMETIMES WE DON'T EVEN RECOGNIZE OUR OWN DIS-MEMBERING. LISTEN TO WHAT THE LEADERS, THE SOLDIERS, AND THE OTHER THIEF IN TODAY'S GOSPEL SAY. **"SAVE YOURSELF. PROVE WHO YOU ARE. SAVE US."**

THEY WANT TO ESCAPE THEIR LIVES RATHER THAN HAVE THEM PUT BACK TOGETHER IN A WAY THEY COULD NEVER IMAGINE. SO THEY MOCK. THEY DERIDE JESUS. THEY DEMAND PROOF...

THESE ARE ALL SIGNS OF THEIR OWN DISMEMBERMENT. THEY EVEN DIVIDE, DIS-MEMBER, JESUS' CLOTHES. IN THE MIDST OF ALL THAT, HOWEVER, THERE IS AN IRONIC TRUTH. IT IS AN INSCRIPTION HANGING ABOVE JESUS - **"THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS."**

THIS SIGN HANGS ABOVE THE CROSS AS A DECLARATION... A RE-MEMBERING BETWEEN THE JEWS AND THEIR KING, BETWEEN GOD AND HIS PEOPLE, BETWEEN JESUS AND US.

THE CROSS IS THE ULTIMATE ACT OF RE-MEMBERING; GOD IN CHRIST JOINING AND ALIGNING HIMSELF WITH US IN THE PAIN AND SUFFERING OF THIS LIFE. RE-MEMBERING IS ALWAYS AN ACT OF LOVE.

EVERY TIME WE PARTICIPATE IN THE LIFE OF CHRIST BY LIVING WITH MERCY, COMPASSION, FORGIVENESS; EVERY TIME WE SPEAK A WORD OF HOPE AND ENCOURAGEMENT; EVERY TIME WE LOVE WITHOUT CONDITION, EXPECTATION, OR PAYMENT...

EVERY TIME WE SHARE OUR BREAD AND LIVE IN COMMUNION WITH ONE ANOTHER WE PARTICIPATE IN CHRIST'S RE-MEMBERING OF OUR OWN LIVES AND THE LIFE OF THE WORLD.

IN REMEMBRANCE OF JESUS, WE SHARE CHRIST'S BODY AND BLOOD THIS MORNING AS WE COME FORWARD FOR THE SACRAMENT OF HOLY COMMUNION. PARADISE IS THE STATE OF BEING REMEMBERED, AND IT IS WHAT IS OFFERED TO US IN THE LORD'S SUPPER.

IT'S NOT ABOUT THE PAST OR THE FUTURE. IT IS ABOUT TODAY. PARADISE IS THE PRESENCE OF JESUS OUR KING WITH US, GIVING US HIMSELF AND HIS VICTORY, NO MATTER WHAT OUR CIRCUMSTANCES. **"TODAY YOU WILL BE WITH ME IN PARADISE."**

ULTIMATELY, IT IS THE PROMISE THAT JOINS THE MANY DIFFERENT ENDINGS IN OUR LIVES WITH A NEW BEGINNING. IN CHRIST, WE ARE NEVER FORGOTTEN, BUT ALWAYS RE-MEMBERED. IN JESUS, AMEN.