

Kimberly Reinholtz
Grace and Holy Trinity
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Luke 23:33-43

“Jesus remember me when you come into your kingdom”

This is one of the first Taize chants that I learned. It has always been poignant for me. When I hear it I remember my experience as a graduate student at the University of Sussex and a time in my own life when I was feeling pretty forgotten. It was a blessing that in that time I found my way to a church community where they worshiped on Sundays with the book of common worship (it was the U.K. After all) and during the week they opened their doors to refugees and asylum seekers living into their understanding of welcoming everyone into paradise. This parish is where I learned how to be a Christian. It might seem strange since I had been a practicing Episcopalian for most of my life. I had loved worship as an acolyte, chorister and parishioner, but it took feeling like an outsider to understand what it meant to be a member of the inclusive community of Christ's body. I was 25 years old living in a foreign country working with people who truly lived outside of the system when I learned what it meant to live as a Christian. When I was re-invited with open arms I learned how to provide that same hospitality to others.

I think that almost all of us can look at our lives and think of a time when we felt excluded, forgotten, abandoned. I hope that all of us can also remember a time when we were welcomed, remembered and reunited with someone we love.

For some of us the moment of separation was brought about by something we did. Choices we made such as walking away from a relationship prematurely out of anger and frustration or committing a crime like those

who were crucified alongside Jesus. Sometimes our own actions cause division and distress in interpersonal relationships.

For others feeling alone is a side effect of circumstances beyond our control. Changes in the culture- advances in technology, shifts in the job market, life events births and deaths marriages and divorces can make us feel left behind and make us long for relationships which no longer exist.

Still others especially those who live on the margins because of differences like gender, sexual orientation, skin color, and language are some ways singled out through no fault of our own.

Regardless of if our separation is by choice context or circumstance the feeling of exclusion is ubiquitous in culture- it's something recognizable in all stages of life. From the playground to the cemetery there are stories of inclusion and exclusion. We all have seen the lonely child sitting on the bench during recess. We may have heard about individuals such as the Boston Marathon bomber who have been denied burial because of their notorious crimes¹. The essence of this kind of separation is that people are in or out, alike or different, are allies or enemies based upon choice or context or circumstance.

However this natural division may seem, it is counter to who we are meant to be as Christians. As subjects in the Kingdom of God, a God who created, a God who came as Jesus to provide redemption for, a God who continues to inspire us all to come together and make this world more like the Kingdom which was and is and is to come. we are called to be the

¹ Tamerlan Tsarnaev was eventually buried in a private cemetery in Virginia, however this was only after all of the cemeteries in Worschester, MA denied his burial on their properties. For more information you can read these articles.

<http://www.npr.org/2013/05/06/181678766/in-boston-a-rare-rejection-of-the-dead>

<http://www.cnn.com/2013/05/10/us/virginia-boston-suspect-burial/>

inclusive community rather than an exclusive one. This is what it means to be heirs to the kingdom of heaven and to serve Christ the King.

It means that when we find ourselves on the outskirts, there is someone always there to welcome us back into community. It means that we ask those on the outskirts back into community as well. This is what Jesus promises to us, as well as to the criminal who asks to be remembered, that today we will be with him in paradise.

This world is far from paradise there are many broken pieces that can be pointed to in our own lives, in the nation and in the world. Places of illness and discontent. Places where there is animosity and division. Places of instability and war. We know where the world has fallen away from God's perfect creation. We have known since the time we left Eden this world is not paradise.

But paradise exists and is promised not only in the life to come but in our lives on Earth, glimpses of it are visible in moments of healing, reconciliation, and peacemaking. We have known since the moment that Jesus invited his crucified neighbor into His kingdom that we can experience a Holy kingdom in this world here and now.

The Kingdom of God is among us. The Kingdom of God is within us. The Kingdom of God is open to all of us. Yet we continue to live as if it is an exclusive club. We continue to live as if paradise cannot be experienced yet.

God created us all. Jesus redeemed us all. The Holy Spirit invites us all into the Kingdom where Christ is King. This is where paradise can already be found in the Holy Trinity in our own lives.

Today we are celebrating. We are celebrating at our Crossroads service the rebirth of two individuals. In a rare occurrence in the Episcopal tradition

they are both able to make the covenant for themselves. We have one teen and one adult committing themselves to the Body of Christ. Making these promises for themselves they recognize that they are no longer outside of the Body of Christ, by their own choosing they come to the waters of baptism to become fully incorporated members in this Church.

What that means in action is that they are committed to invite everyone they meet into the community of believers. Through their thoughts words and deeds. This is what we promise through our baptismal vows is that we will do our best to usher the Kingdom of God into existence, that we will be the bearers of Holiness into the world. That we will walk the walk and talk the talk and do the deeds which need to be done to bring the world to an understanding that this brokenness that we know and this exclusion that we feel and this fear that we live in will not be eternal, that today and every day we have the opportunity to know and be in paradise with Jesus Christ our savior.

Even in suffering Christ promises paradise. In spite of suffering. In the face of suffering Jesus provides an invitation into something better. Into something Holy. Into something beautiful and perfect and beloved.

We are invited through our baptism to share the invitation to paradise with our friends, with our neighbors, with our enemies, with our persecutors. We are expected with God's help to share our experience of paradise with those who are feeling alienated, alone, abandoned and fearful. Jesus knows these feelings. Jesus knows what it means to be powerless, impoverished, and depressed. This is why it is so important that we know that Jesus was the incarnate God. Because in his earthly life even in his final moments in one of his last statements on earth, he was able to invite an undeserving person- a self confessed criminal who is being executed- into paradise.

Like Jesus we are asked to invite the unlikely to come with us into paradise because although we are invited into paradise and we are unworthy and only invited by grace.

All of us are sinners. All of us will sin again and seek redemption. All of us will find ourselves outside looking in. All of us will know again that feeling of separation from God. Yet all of us are at the same moment forgiven, welcomed with open arms and reconciled with God. We don't always know it, often times it takes someone else to remind us of that. But it is always true.

Today you will be with Jesus in paradise. You are invited and always welcome. Go into the world and share that invitation. Let those who you see who are struggling know that Jesus loves them, that you love them and that paradise is waiting for them. Not tomorrow but today.

Amen