

Sunday Morning Worship at Brentwood, Nov 20, 2016

Notes for the sermon Being with Jesus in Paradise



Ps 46 and Luke 23:33-43 Sermon Text = Luke 23:42-43

Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." He replied, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

[Hymns = 206, 238, and 248 in the *Book of Praise*]

Key Ideas

1. My first thought when I saw this crucifixion story was the suggested passage in the lectionary for this Sunday as we approach the Advent season was, "What's going on here? How come they've got Easter messing with Christmas? There must be some mistake!" – but the more I thought about it, the more it made sense – so let me try and share some of that sense with you this morning
2. Through Advent and Christmas, we wait for and celebrate the coming of Jesus, the Christ or the Messiah in and through whom God redeems the world for good – God reconciles all of creation, including his human creatures, into the community of God that we catch a glimpse of in our ideas about the Holy Trinity – mutual interdependence dancing in the joy of flourishing life – that's what Paradise is – being with God – being in friendly companionship with the Source of our being – the life-growing energy that infuses every dimension of our beings – this is the coming of the King of all creation who rules with love, as God, the initiating energy of creation, intended from the start
3. But you have to have been there, through some deep gift to our imaginations, on Good Friday – on the day of crucifixion – this is Christ's coronation – on a garbage heap – slowly dying in agony on a cross – with two other criminal outcasts suffering the same torture on either side of him – Luke, of all the stories that could have been told about that day, chooses to record the prayer of one of the criminals, probably gasped in pain, and the promise of Jesus, probably whispered in exhaustion – "You will be with me in Paradise" – this is a powerful way for Luke to reinforce his theme of including/accepting the outsider
4. Throughout the history of the Christian church, there have been a multitude of attempts to depict and describe Paradise – all contain elements of truth and all miss the mark – we see things now through a glass darkly, as Paul so eloquently admitted – but there is one truth that we do know about Paradise, revealed to us so clearly in Jesus, God's Christ – and that truth is that we will be with God in all of God's glory and energy – we will be with God, face to face with the Trinity's overpowering love – that is Paradise – and we get a foretaste or glimpse of it here, in this life, as we grow in Christ's grace

At this stage in our ponderings, then ...

What, then, is the impact of this promise from Jesus from his terrifying coronation room? – it sees to me that there are three for us to consider further – first, it brings acceptance, even to an outsider being executed – second, it offers the nourishment of Jesus' friendship – third, it offers a community of support in the growth that comes from that nourishment – acceptance, nourishment and support – how can those gifts transform your life as you receive them with gratitude?