

“The Day Paradise Opened” (Luke 23:27-43)
November 20, 2022 – Last Sunday in the Church Year

Remember the old black and white movie “The Day the Earth Stood Still?” The inhabitants of the earth halted as the alien spacecraft landed. Everything stopped that day. Everything stood still. The Covid virus put a lot of things on hold. It’s like the whole world stood still. Classes were canceled at the Seminary and I had to take my final classes from home over the internet. Because of the virus, many things closed down – Schools, theme and recreational parks, and movie theaters. Restaurants closed their doors, not knowing when they will be back open. Even sports teams were told to sit still and wait.

But the day came when the restrictions began to be lifted. People went back to working outside of the home, playgrounds were played on, kids went back to school, and even movie theaters started to allow in-person viewing. Our favorite sports picked back up and people came to the stadiums to root for their beloved teams. Restaurants were open once again for business. Through time, we seemed to some extent put Covid in the rear-view mirror. Yes, we should not take the virus lightly, but for the most part, Covid has lost a lot of its grip and control. Things and life seem to be opened up once again.

Today we finish the Church year with the reading of Luke’s crucifixion account. Jesus made his journey to Jerusalem to finish his mission of dying for the sins of the whole world – past, present, and future. As Jesus makes his way from Pilate’s presence to the cross, many people followed him and were mourning. Jesus responds by saying to them that they should not mourn for him, but rather for themselves and their children.

This is a strange response don’t you think? How can life get any worse than being beaten and scourged to an inch of your life, then having a crown of thorns pressed and beaten on top of your head? And how can it get any worse as you’re given a wooden heavy cross to make your way down a long path that leads to a hill where you will be nailed to the very cross that you’re carrying? Why not mourn for Jesus?

But Jesus says that there are people that are in a worse condition than he. Some people are in a terrible state that should be mourned over. Their condition is so bad, that they’re like Judas Iscariot. It would’ve been best not to have been borne. It’s as if Jesus is saying that it would be best that the womb of women would be closed. This way no one would come into the world and saturate it with

even more sin. On account of the sinful nature, we've inherited from Adam and Eve, it's best that the door to life in this world would be closed.

After Jesus was led to be put to death and nailed to a cross on a hill called The Skull along with two criminals, we get a glimpse of the people Jesus was talking about. Luke writes that Christ's garments were divided up and people stood by watching. The rulers scoffed at Jesus as he hung on the cross, "**He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One!**" Also, the soldiers joined in along with the rulers. They mocked him saying, "**If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!**" And last but not least, one of the criminals that were being hanged beside Jesus railed into him saying, "**Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!**" These are the people Jesus said to mourn for. They all have a confession that condemns them. They show their unbelief in the very Chosen One who's dying for their sins.

Paradise will be closed to those who sneer, mock and blaspheme Christ. These we are to mourn for Jesus says. For on the last day, the door will be closed for all eternity. That is the day Jesus refers to at the beginning of our gospel lesson. On that day people will long to be put to death quickly.

But that day hasn't come. Jesus says now is the time to weep for those who don't believe in him as their King, as their Savior. We who confess and hold fast to Christ weep and pray for those who sneer, mock and blaspheme Jesus. We pray that the Father would have mercy on them, forgive them, and hold back his wrath upon them for Jesus' sake. We should love the unrepentant and bear witness to them that the Father has freed them on account of his Son's death and resurrection. We pray that they would come to repentance and receive the forgiveness of sins won by Christ upon the cross. We should pray for them, love them, and share the Good News that the door to paradise has been opened back up. We share that the Good News is that the flaming sword guarding Eden has been removed. We share that through the death of Jesus, the door is opened to paradise and they can freely enter once again into the new garden of Eden in Christ Jesus.

Dear friend, learn from the thief on the cross. Confess and receive the forgiveness of sins from the Chosen One who died for you. Enter once again in God's presence. Enter into paradise with Christ. Yes, on that day when the new heavens and the earth will open to his children, but even now. Enter into paradise where the Father resides by clothing yourself in the garments of your baptism. Christ was stripped of his garments so that they would be given to you to put on every day as a child

of paradise. And the water that poured out of Christ's side washes you clean of your sin and you're free to enter into the Father's presence.

Enter into paradise where you hear the Word of God. In Christ, you don't have to fear God's voice that once called out to Adam and Eve. His Word that comes out of the wooden lectern and the pulpit is the same Word that came out of Jesus' mouth from the wooden cross. Here once again God's Word, "**Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.**" Jesus, even when he was dying, prayed that the Father would forgive you of your sins. And on account of the Chosen One's death, the Father forgives you this day and every day as you come to him like the thief on the cross.

Come freely and partake of the banquet of paradise prepared by Christ. Partake of the body that was broken and crucified on the cross as it's offered up in the Lord's Supper. Drink the blood poured out from Jesus' side through the wine in the cup. Truly, you're with Jesus through this Meal of Paradise.

And on that great day, when Christ returns for those who confess Jesus of doing no wrong, we will be ushered into paradise where we will even meet the thief on the cross, and all others who confess the Christ, the Chosen One who won for us all the gift of paradise. Child of paradise, enter, the door is wide open!

Pastor Jon Carpenter