

Pastor Geoffrey R. Boyle
Last Sunday of the Church Year (Proper 29—C)
21 November 2010
Grace and Trinity Lutheran Churches, Wichita
Lk 23.27-43

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit

If you doubted what I said last week—
about the Last Day actually being the Day of the Cross, Good Friday—
then today's reading should set you straight!

Here, at the end of the Church year, the last Sunday of Green, we find ourselves on the cross.

Nails piercing our hands and feet,
blood pouring down our backs where the Romans have beaten us with rods and whips—
our bodies broken, our spirits crushed,
we're done for; it's over.

It's the Last Day of the Church year, the end times, judgment day—
the Day when "you see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked" (Mal 3:18)
and we're on the cross.

But we're not alone, here!

No, we're simply thieves hanging justly for what we've done—
but there's a third,
an innocent man who hasn't committed any crime.

His beating was just as bad as ours, but they went over the top in their mocking.

While they beat Him they teased Him repeatedly saying,
"He saved others; let Him save Himself, if He is the Christ of God, His Chosen One!"
(Lk 23:35)
"If You are the King of the Jews, save Yourself!" (23:37)
"Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!" (23:39)

They cast lots for His clothing (23:34), gave Him sour wine (23:36), and put a plaque over His head (23:38).

But why? Why'd they do it? What wrong has He done? (23:41)

"For if they do these things when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?" (23:31)
That is, if God does this to one who is innocent, what will He do to the one truly guilty?

And so we pray,
"Jesus, remember *me* when You come into Your kingdom" (23:42).

These are the only words we can say.
they're words of fear and awe,
they don't defend us or pretend to justify what we've done;

they simply beg Jesus for mercy.

We don't have a shot in this life.

You will die.

Sin will finally run its course in your body—

maybe it'll be pneumonia that gets you, or a heart attack,

it could be a car wreck, a slip on the ice, or even falling asleep and not waking up.

Whatever way it comes, you've got a Last Day.

And when you're on your Last Day, these are your words:

“Jesus, remember me when You come into Your Kingdom” (23:42).

His Kingdom, what we call Heaven, isn't yours by right or achievement.

In fact, your works keep you out.

Your sin disqualifies you.

And there's nothing *you* can do about it!

Therefore we thank God that on our Last Day—

on the Last Day of the Church year,

the Day of Judgment and vengeance and retribution—

Christ gets the last word, not us:

“Truly, I say to you, *today* you will be with Me in Paradise” (23:43).

The last words of the Church Year,

the last words of your life,

are the words of promise!

You can't get more sure than when the Lord promises.

And His promise comes as a gift: freely, undeservedly, without merit or earning—*Gospel*.

It's not because you're good looking or hard working,

It's not because you're consistent in your giving or faithful in attendance,

It's not because you've said the right words, stayed out of enough trouble, or done better than someone else—

It's simply because He loves you!

He loves the criminals on the cross,

the people standing by and watching (23:35),

the scoffing rulers, mocking soldiers,

and even you.

Jesus loves *you*.

He's loved you since before you were ever born!

He loves you every day of your life,

even the Last Day, the day when everything and everyone seems to drift away.

He loves you who are lonely and barren, weak and poor, hated and despised, dead and dying!

And you know all of this because He's promised that you will be with Him in Paradise.

Today. *Today* you will be with Him. Or better, *today* He will be with you!

In the midst of death, suffering, crucifixion, mocking, scoffing, and unbelief,
 Jesus forgives: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (23:34);
 and then He promises, "Today, you'll be with me in Paradise" (23:43).

Promise and forgiveness go hand in hand.

And that's why you're here.

You're here because this is the place where Jesus has promised to be for you.

You're here on the cross, suffering the due penalty of your sin, and even here you aren't alone!

This man, this innocent man, hangs for you.

Jesus, who is eternally God:

"God from God, Light from Light, very God of very God" (Nicene Creed)—
 Suffers a *Last Day*.

The infinite God, who always was and is and is to come, joins you on the Last Day.

He is the Perfect Sacrifice, the lamb without blemish or defect.

And because of this perfect sacrifice, He promises you a new day—

A day beyond the Last Day.

He promises you a day, called Today, that's no longer marked by suffering, scoffing, or mocking—no more loneliness, barrenness, or fear, no more death!

Today, He promises life and Paradise—

And because He knows your need of assurance and reminders,
 He puts His promise into your very mouths!

He feeds you His own Body and Blood for your forgiveness, life, and salvation.

All that mocking, "He saved others; let Him save Himself," was right!

He saved others—that's as clear as it gets.

And today He saves you—He saves you on the Last Day.

He promises you a new day, *Today*, marked by life and joy and Paradise.

"Truly, I say to you, *today* you will be with Me in Paradise" (23:43).

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit