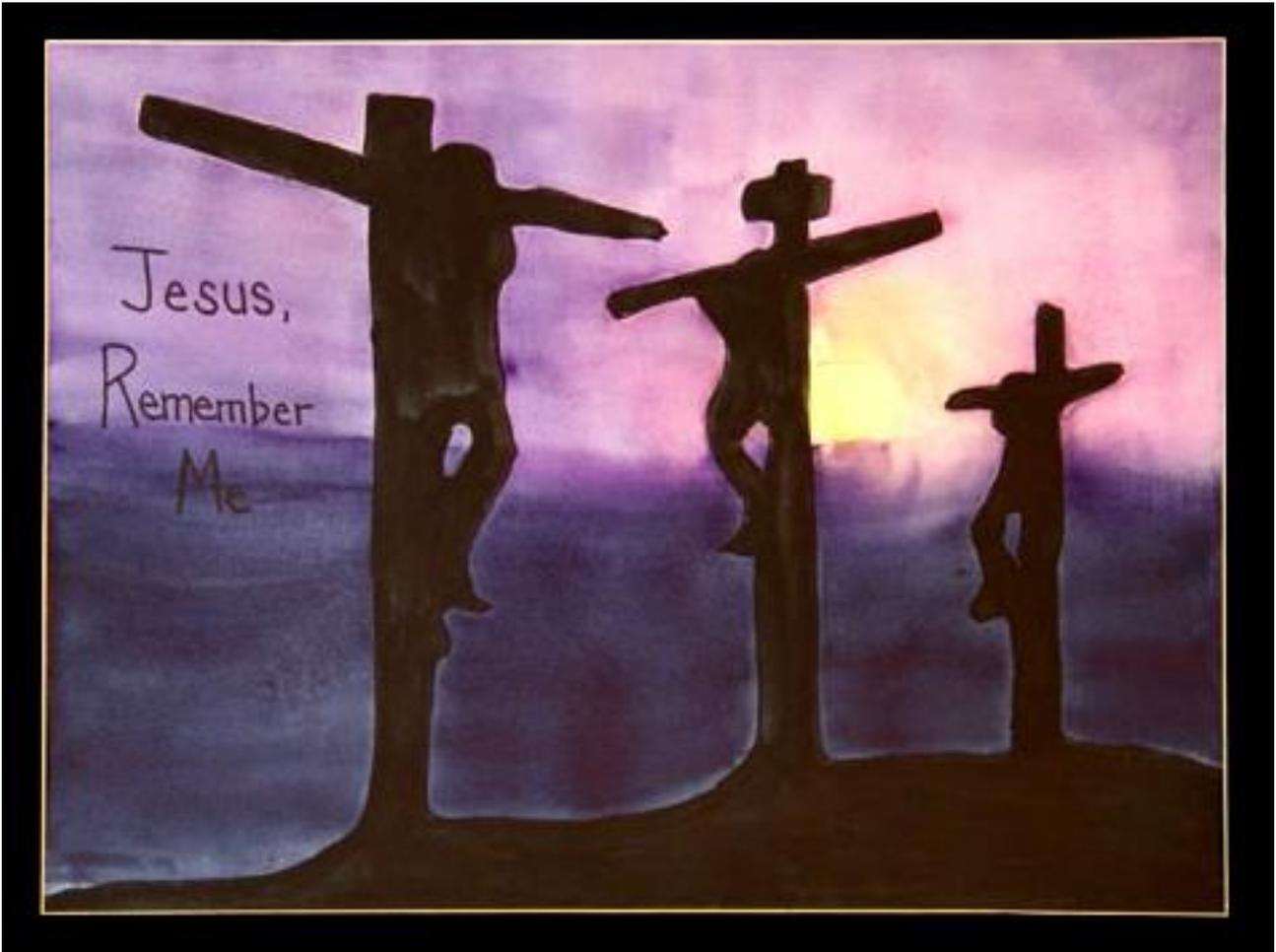


S.P.A.C.E. for Lent - Wednesday 31st March 2021

Pardon



Jesus Remember Me - Linda Roberts (2007)

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³² Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed. ³³ When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him there, along with the criminals – one on his right, the other on his left. ³⁴ Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.’ And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.

³⁵ The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, ‘He saved others; let him save himself if he is God’s Messiah, the Chosen One.’

³⁶ The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar ³⁷ and said, ‘If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself.’

³⁸ There was a written notice above him, which read: this is the king of the Jews.

³⁹ One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: ‘Aren’t you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!’

⁴⁰ But the other criminal rebuked him. ‘Don’t you fear God,’ he said, ‘since you are under the same sentence? ⁴¹ We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.’

⁴² Then he said, ‘Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.’

⁴³ Jesus answered him, ‘Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.’

Linda Roberts' portrayal of the crucifixion takes us beyond the sombreness of Good Friday. Three bodies slump forward from their crosses but we do not see their agony because the dying figures are shown in silhouette. Instead our attention is drawn towards the sunlit distance. This may be a reminder of the better future which is open to all as a result of Jesus' death on the Cross. However the words beside the figure on Jesus' right hand side, "Jesus remember me," suggest that it refers to the assurance that Jesus gave to the penitent criminal.

Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise. (v43)

That man was powerfully and personally promised a better future by the dying Jesus.

During Lent our SPACE reflections have focused on the theme of forgiveness and restoration. In today's passage we have, quite literally, Jesus' last words on the subject. They come from two of Jesus' seven last "words" from the cross.

Significantly, the very first of the seven was a spontaneous offer of forgiveness:

Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing (v34)

Despite the pain and humiliation he had faced over the last two days and in the face of imminent death Jesus' first words from the Cross were to offer open-ended forgiveness to the men who were actually doing this to him. This was grace in action and a vivid reminder that forgiveness was at the very centre of Jesus' teaching. The way he offered forgiveness at the end has been a model for persecuted or martyred Christians ever since, starting with Stephen whose final words were: *'Lord, do not hold this sin against them.'* (Acts 7:60).

The second word from the cross was to the penitent criminal (a thief according to the accounts in Matthew and Mark). To the soldiers who were carrying out the order to execute him, Jesus offer of forgiveness could seem to be qualified. Had he asked for their forgiveness just because they had not understood what they were doing? Here in this case Jesus was dealing with a man who quite clearly knew he had been doing wrong. But the man accepted responsibility for what he had done ("*we are getting what our deeds deserve*" v 41). In his dying moments that man recognised his own past sinfulness but could see that Jesus was innocent. Jesus offers him the promise of a place with him in paradise (v43).

In those few brief words from the cross Jesus brought together three of the strongest threads that had run through his three years of earthly ministry.

- Forgiveness offered in grace by God, through Jesus;
- the importance of heartfelt repentance from the sinner;
- the promise of full restoration in God's kingdom to those who were forgiven.

Even as he uttered those words from the Cross Jesus was going through the very process - crucifixion to be followed by resurrection - which would ensure that all mankind could be restored to a right relationship with God.

The penitent thief may not have realised the significance of what was happening around him but with a simple uncomplicated faith he put his trust in the man beside him when he asked:

Jesus, remember me

Jesus did remember him, and remembers all who turn to him, no matter what has gone before.

Thank God that he does and thank God that it is never too late.

A psalm and a hymn for reflection

Psalm 32

Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven,
whose sins are covered.

² Blessed is the one whose sin the Lord does not count against them
and in whose spirit is no deceit.

³ When I kept silent, my bones wasted away
through my groaning all day long.

⁴ For day and night your hand was heavy on me;
my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer.

⁵ Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity.
I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord.'
And you forgave the guilt of my sin.

⁶ Therefore let all the faithful pray to you while you may be found;
surely the rising of the mighty waters will not reach them.

⁷ You are my hiding-place;
you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance.

⁸ I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go;
I will counsel you with my loving eye on you.

⁹ Do not be like the horse or the mule, which have no understanding
but must be controlled by bit and bridle or they will not come to you.

¹⁰ Many are the woes of the wicked,
but the Lord's unfailing love surrounds the one who trusts in him.

¹¹ Rejoice in the Lord and be glad, you righteous;
sing, all you who are upright in heart!

To God be the glory

1. To God be the glory, great things He hath done;
So loved He the world that He gave us His Son,
Who yielded His life an atonement for sin,
And opened the life gate that all may go in.

*Praise the Lord, praise the Lord,
Let the earth hear His voice!*

*Praise the Lord, praise the Lord,
Let the people rejoice!*

*O come to the Father, through Jesus the Son,
And give Him the glory, great things He hath done.*

2. O perfect redemption, the purchase of blood,
To every believer the promise of God;
The vilest offender who truly believes,
That moment from Jesus a pardon receives.

3. Great things He hath taught us, great things He hath done,
And great our rejoicing through Jesus the Son;
But purer, and higher, and greater will be
Our wonder, our transport, when Jesus we see.

A prayer for Holy Week (the collect for Palm Sunday)

Almighty and everlasting God,
who in your tender love towards the human race sent your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ
to take upon him our flesh and to suffer death upon the cross:
grant that we may follow the example of his patience and humility,
and also be made partakers of his resurrection;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen

Therefore, my friends, I want you to know
that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you.
Through him everyone who believes is set free from every sin
Acts 13:38, 39(a)

***The next reflection will be posted on Wednesday April 7th
but there will be also be a S.P.A.C.E service,
incorporating periods for silent reflection, prayers
and a short act of Holy Communion***

**9.00 a.m. Wednesday 7th April
in St. Mary's Church**