

Remember Me

Last Sunday 2016

Pastor Josh Frazee

Luke 23:27-43

Grace, peace, and mercy be to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Who do you want to remember you when you die? Your family? Your friends? Others? And if you want to be remembered, *for* what would you want to be remembered? For what you did at a specific time in your life? As a parent, or as a brother or sister, or as a leader in your occupational field?

It seems that some people have this desire when they pass away. A couple fairly familiar bands have songs on the topic. The 1980's band Simple Minds may be best known for their hit "Don't You (Forget About Me)". A little more recently, Linkin Park had as a B-track on their album *Minutes to Midnight* the song "Leave Out All the Rest."

Both of these songs express the desire for someone left behind to remember the one who is singing for one reason or another. The Simple Minds track is from the 1985 movie "The Breakfast Club" and has one of the students asking the others: when you see me again, will you say hi, or just pass on by? Will you remember me after all that we've been through, or just ignore me? The Linkin Park track asks what the singer will be leaving behind when he passes away, and requests that the listener only remember the good times, and leave out all the rest.

It is most certainly appropriate to remember the good times had with a loved one who has passed once they are asleep, even at the visitation or the meal following the committal. We remember the blessings which the Lord provided to that loved one while they were here and the memories of that person that we can still treasure.

Yet should our family or friends or coworkers be the ones we put first when we think about who we want to remember us when we die? Our Gospel text offers us another choice. Turn with me as we explore our reading from Jesus' last moments to a criminal's last moments on earth.

Verse 1

As we begin looking at the text from Luke, we keep in mind that throughout His earthly life, Jesus never lost sight of what He was doing or for whom He was doing it. As He approached the place of the Skull, women behind Him were mourning His impending death. Jesus turned around to them, maybe to acknowledge their weeping on His behalf, but even more so to lament what was coming for them. He said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For behold, the days are coming when they will say, "Blessed are the barren and the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!" Then they will begin to say to the mountains, "Fall on us," and to the hills, "Cover us."'"

Jesus does not ask for others to remember Him; instead, He laments the oncoming destruction of Jerusalem. He shows pity for those who would have suffering in the years to come. He puts others before Himself even up to His own death.

How easy would that be for you to do? Would you be able to think of others if you knew that you were about to die? And especially if you knew that the death you were about to die would be one of suffering and pain, instead of peacefully in your sleep? What about in general: Do you more often only think of yourself? What you want. What you need. How things are going for you.

Now—at the end of the Church Year—we look to the future. We look to the end of our lives. Are we ready—are *you* ready for Jesus to return? Are you able to say with Paul that you have fought the good fight of faith? You and I are sinners who far too frequently only consider what it is that we want or need, yet for the sake of Christ Jesus and the death He was about to die and His resurrection, our Heavenly Father does not remember our sins, mine or yours, but instead continues to give us His Holy Spirit that we might live forever with Him. Even Paul was not able to write that he had fought the good fight on his own, but only because he knew that God had shown him mercy through Jesus. From that love of the Father give to me and to you, we learn to love our neighbors, and most certainly those of the faith.

Verse 2

After Jesus replied to the women mourning for Him, He and two criminals were hung on crosses, “one on his right and one on his left. And Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.’...And the people stood by, watching, but the rulers scoffed at him, saying, ‘He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One!’ The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and...saying, ‘If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!’ There was also an inscription over him, ‘This is the King of the Jews.’”

Though some of them did not believe that Jesus was truly the King of the Jews, the inscription had still been hung. Whether it was by faith on the part of Pontius Pilate or just stubbornness to change it, we may never know, but it was there for all to see. Nevertheless, many of those gathered around slandered Jesus even as He hung to death. The motivations of the ones agreeing with His death were many and varied, but, whatever their reasons, they probably did not care if He would remember them or not. Despite their animosity and disappointment in Him, Jesus did remember them. He prayed for every one of them, both the ones cursing Him and the ones mourning Him, as He prayed to His Father on their behalf. He would remember them whether they remembered Him or not.

A few weeks ago, we heard about the martyr Stephen, who, like Jesus, prayed for his enemies as he was being killed. Some of his last thoughts were for those who were killing him. If today were your last day, would your thoughts be the same for your enemies? If you were to be killed, would you desire that the ones killing you would repent and be saved?

In our Lord Jesus, we find the strength of faith to do just that. Jesus’ prayer was not only for the forgiveness of those gathered around His cross, but for all people of all time, including you and me. So what can man do to us? Nothing in all of the universe can separate us from the love of God we have received in Christ Jesus. So how rich are we? How rich are you? Can even death take away your salvation in Jesus? If your salvation rests in Him, then no. No one and no-thing can take away the eternal life you have coming to you because it’s not up to you or your works. You have grace: God’s Riches at Christ’s Expense.

Verse 3

“One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, ‘Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!’ But the other rebuked him, saying, ‘Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.’ And he said, ‘Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.’ And (Jesus) said to him, ‘Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.’”

In the midst of everything else going on, a criminal is given pardon and assurance of everlasting life. Despite only having a few hours left in his life, this man confesses his sin and begs Jesus to remember him, and Jesus promises that He will.

This side of death, there is always a chance for repentance, even in one's closing hours. But while Jesus came to save us the first time He walked on earth, when He returns, He will be coming to judge. When that Day comes, or when the day to die has come, it is too late—you will have either been called to faith or you will have refused to hear and believe the Gospel. As we celebrate the closing of another year in Christ here at Augsburg Immanuel, we also recognize that our time is drawing closer to its end. Whether we die or Jesus returns, our time left is limited.

But dear brothers and sisters in Christ, you have been called to faith in Jesus, the Son of God, through His Word and Sacraments. Today, we believe and trust that God has sent us His Holy Spirit to keep each of us, me and you, in true faith even as we pass through the gate of death into eternal life. At that time, it will not be about who has the most wealth or having done enough good works. Like the criminal, of ourselves, we can only confess that we have been sinners who rightly deserve punishment. But also like the criminal, we can lean wholly on Jesus' mercy and grace for our salvation, knowing that as we are kept in the faith, we will hear the same word from Jesus: ““Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.”” In Jesus' Name. Amen.