

Good Friday sermon 2014

Luke 23:32-43, 44-49

“The King Submits”

Timothy McVeigh. 33 years old. 168 counts of murder. Lethal injection.

Ted Bundy. 43. Rape. Necrophilia. 35 counts of murder. Electric chair.

Ronnie Lee Gardner. 49. Burglary. Robbery. 2 counts of murder. Firing squad.

Teresa Lewis. 41. Murder, Conspiracy and Robbery. Lethal injection.

Stephen Anderson. 49. Burglary. Assault. 7 counts of murder. Lethal injection.

John Wayne Gacy. 52. Rape. 33 counts of murder. Lethal injection.

Ronald Joseph Ryan. 41. Murdered a police officer. Death by hanging. (The last legal execution in Australia.)

Jesus. 33. Crucifixion.

It doesn't look right, does it?

Next to a list of convicted rapists and murderers, thieves and thugs, there is Jesus. Not only crucified – known in those days as the most painful and degrading capital punishment – but crucified with criminals on either side. Numbered amongst the worst offenders. Added to the list of criminal history.

He healed. He taught. He showed love and mercy and understanding to the lowest of the low – he was the friend of prostitutes and tax collectors – friend to the ones everyone loved to hate. He challenged the leadership of the church with their self righteous attitudes. He stuck up for the poor and the weak.

Crucified next to two criminals. One on his right and one on his left. And he says: *“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”*

Still showing mercy even to those who are murdering him.

They strip him naked and gamble to see who wins his clothes. And people sneered at him. Mocked him. Challenged him to save himself. This is the King. Jesus. The Creator. And he's on a cross.

Good Friday is about one thing: Justice.

And I think as humans we all crave justice. We want things to be fair. We don't like being blamed for something we didn't do. We don't like someone accusing us of cheating or lying, or stealing, or gossip. And we don't like a guilty person to go free, or an innocent person convicted. We want to see justice done.

And that's why I think this picture of Jesus on a cross cuts us so deeply even today. Because here is the King of love hanging on a cross of shame. Here is the creator facing execution by his creation. Here is the innocent being sentenced with the guilty. Even a criminal hanging next to him mocks him - verse 39:

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

But then, in verse 40:

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."

And there it is. The words that I think mean so much to us, because it captures the whole problem with this scene. "WE are punished justly. WE are getting what we deserve. But THIS man has done nothing wrong."

Even a criminal knows this! Jesus has done nothing wrong.

III – Think about the worst things you've ever done. Your greatest sins. Your top list of worst moments? Words you've said. Things you've done. Thoughts you've had. Murder. Adultery. Theft. Hate. Greed. Malice. Gossip. Coveting. Swearing. Impure thoughts. What have you done? What are your deep dark secrets? Think about those things just for a moment. Because this is how we come to understand why today is called "GOOD" Friday.

You see, when we think about the innocence of Jesus hanging on that cross, and we think about our own guilt, WE need to identify with the **criminals**. WE deserve that punishment. Not Jesus.

But THAT is why Jesus was on that cross. That is why he "deserved" to be there. Because he was taking the punishment for our sin. All of our sin. All of it was on his shoulders. All the **guilt** was on him. All the **judgment** was on him. All our **shame** was on him. All our **punishment** was on him.

And now we have a moment of absolute clarity – a moment that takes away all the big questions that plague us as sinful human beings: 'What must **I** do?' And 'Will Jesus take ALL my sin?' verse 42:

42 Then (the criminal) 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."

The criminal says: "Remember me"

And Jesus says: "Done. You're saved. Today."

The second criminal recognized who Jesus was. He knew Jesus didn't DESERVE execution. But he also realized that he himself DID. He realized that he DESERVED to die for his sins. So he calls on the name of Jesus. Remember me. Save me. When you get to your kingdom, let me be yours.

Done.

And what did the criminal **DO**? He believed. He trusted. He recognized his own sin. And he turned to God. This is the greatest conversion in history. Here is the proof – our salvation does NOT depend on what WE DO. This criminal didn't **do** anything to be saved! Except... recognising that Jesus is the King, and that Jesus is the only one who could save him.

III – Mickey Rooney passed away early last week. In an interview back in 1995, Rooney said:

"I've given my life to God, and I try and do the right thing, but inevitably, and unfortunately, I do the wrong thing. I suffer from being human."

You see, that's our problem in a nutshell. We try. But we fail. Because we're human.

On the news last week, they showed an interview where Rooney was asked: "What words would you like to appear on your tombstone?" He answered "Two words: **I tried.**"

And this is all we CAN do. We can TRY. But we fail. Those words, "I tried", really mean "I didn't make it." I tried to be successful. I tried to save his life. I tried to love my children. It's a statement that admits failure at least on some level.

But what Jesus does for us is to say: 'It's not about what YOU'VE done. It's not about **your** trying and **your** failures. It's about what I'VE done.' Even if you're a criminal hanging on a cross, Jesus says: 'Believe in me, trust in me, put your faith in me, and you will be saved.'

Because it's not about what **we've** done. It's about what **Jesus** has done.

And so Jesus is crucified, and then darkness comes over the land in the middle of the day – this is a super-natural event. This is an act of God. And Jesus cries out to his Father, and dies. Then, verse 47:

47 The centurion, seeing what had happened, praised God and said, "Surely this was a righteous man."

The Centurion, the Roman soldier standing by the cross, makes this amazing statement – surely this was a righteous man. An innocent man. NOT a criminal. And the reason this is such a big thing is because in this account from Luke, what we have are TWO people, who are NOT followers of Jesus, NOT Jews, people who are outsiders, and they are the only TWO in the story who recognize Jesus clearly as an innocent, righteous man. Then verse 49:

49 But all those who knew him, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.

All those who knew him stood back! A criminal calls him King. A Centurion calls him righteous. But all those who knew him, stood back watching.

And this is what it's all about. It doesn't matter about your "breeding". You may have been born in a Christian family. You may have read the Bible 100 times. You may be a religious scholar, a teacher, or a priest – it doesn't matter. What MATTERS to God is not what **you've** done, good or bad, and it's not what **you** know, whether you know a little or a lot. It's about recognizing Jesus as the righteous, innocent King, who took the sin of the world upon himself, to save us.

Timothy McVeigh. Ted Bundy. Ronnie Lee Gardner. Teresa Lewis. Stephen Anderson. John Wayne Gacy. Ronald Joseph Ryan. All executed for horrible crimes.

Let me ask – would we add **our** names to that list of criminals? I know this is a big thing, but this is what it's about - for the sins we've committed, could we consider that in God's eyes, **sin is sin**. It's all the same. It all deserves punishment. Murder or gossip. Lying or theft. Thoughts and actions.

Because ALL sin is like a bad egg. You can put 10 good eggs into an omelette and mix them around. And then you add one more. And it's rotten. One bad egg. And it ruins the whole omelette. Even the good eggs are ruined. Sin does that in our lives. Even ONE sin.

Yet Jesus, the innocent one, offers to take our place on that cross of execution that we deserve. And what he says is this:

It doesn't matter what you've done. 1 murder or a thousand. If you've lied, cheated, committed adultery, theft, gossip, or slander. Or even had sinful **thoughts**. Jesus wants us to RECOGNISE Him as the true King over our life, to recognize our sinfulness and that we need his forgiveness. And when we do that, Jesus says:

'I will OWN your sin. ALL OF IT. And your guilt. And your shame. And your punishment. I will take it, because I love you. It's not about what YOU have done. It's about what I have done for you.'

Jesus wants us to respond like the second criminal, and like the Centurion. Good Friday is only GOOD Friday if we can take these two steps:

Recognise our sinfulness, and recognise Jesus as King.

And it doesn't matter who you are or what you've done. If you recognize Jesus as King, and put your trust in Him – then from this day, today, you can be assured of your eternal place with Him in paradise.

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.”

The Death of Jesus

44 It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, **45** for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. **46** Jesus called out with a loud voice, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.” When he had said this, he breathed his last.

47 The centurion, seeing what had happened, praised God and said, “Surely this was a righteous man.” **48** When all the people who had gathered to witness this sight saw what took place, they beat their breasts and went away. **49** But all those who knew him, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.