

April 13 Sermon

Luke 23:42

“Jesus, Remember Me”

“Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”

This prayer—the prayer of a dying thief—is our prayer today.

On this day, when we remember Jesus’ death for us, we remember that it should have been our death, not his. And so, we echo this simple, heartfelt plea:

“Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”

My sins nailed to the cross. Not just that the Son of God suffered and died, but that he suffered and died *for me* and *for you*. We may wish there had been another way. But there wasn’t. His death was necessary—because of our sin. I should be on that cross. He went there on our behalf.

To sit with this story is to see ourselves in it. In a very real sense, we are the crowd that cried out for crucifixion—because it was our sin that made that demand. We are the soldiers who mocked him. We are Peter, who denied even knowing him at the hour of his greatest need. We are Judas, who betrayed him. These aren’t characters we can distance ourselves from. They are us. And we are not innocent.

But we are also the repentant thief, hanging beside Jesus. This criminal knows he’s getting what he deserves. He understands why he belongs on that cross. And yet, in his final moments, he sees something in the man beside him—something no one else seemed to see. He sees hope. And he turns to Jesus, even as they both are dying, and places his trust in him in a way I’ve always found remarkable.

In his book *Death on a Friday Afternoon*, Richard John Neuhaus devotes a chapter to this exchange between Jesus and the thief. He writes:

“Christians are those who, like the thief on the cross, have turned to [Jesus] with faith that is more like a desperate hope and, in listening to his response, have found the faith that moves mountains. When our faith is weak... we are tempted to look at our faith, to worry about our faith, to try to work up more faith. At such times... we must not look to our faith but look to him. Look to him, listen to him, and faith will take care of itself.”

We don’t need great faith—because we have a great God. Our weak faith is more than enough for a God who loves us. What matters is not the size of our faith, but the direction it’s pointed. Look at him—not at your faith. It’s always enough.

When we do, he will remember us. He gives us a second chance. And we all long for that, don’t we?

A second chance to say something different—or not say anything at all. A second chance to repair a relationship. To chase a dream we let go. To follow through on something we avoided. If

you're anything like me, you can probably think of more than a few moments you wish you could do over.

Now imagine being the thief on the cross—*forgiven* by Christ—and instead of being promised Paradise, imagine being let down from the cross. What would you do with that “bonus life”? One you didn't deserve, and never expected?

In a very real sense, that *is* our story.

I imagine that thief remembering, in his darker moments, those dreadful hours on the cross. His desperate prayer. The unexpected answer. And I imagine him carrying that memory through the rest of his days—not as a weight, but as a spark of gratitude. Not rushing toward Paradise, but treasuring the time he had. Every breath an opportunity to thank his Savior. Every day a chance to share the story:

I was saved. I was remembered.

And so were we.

We have been let down from the cross. We've been given this “bonus life.” Unexpected. Undeserved. Life is a gift. And the forgiven life is a grace-filled gift. It is precious. It is not meant to be wasted.

Jesus isn't coming to be just another king or ruler. He's ushering in an entirely new kingdom. A reign marked by life, hope, grace, and—above all—love. The kind of love that never stops offering second chances.

“Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”

This prayer—the prayer of a dying thief—is our prayer today.

Amen.