**“Jesus, Remember Me”**

Psalm 46

Malachi 3:13-18

Colossians 1:13-20

Luke 23:27-43

 Last Sunday of the Church Year

“One of the criminals who were hanged railed at Jesus, 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.’”

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

**Bridge**

The Last Sunday of the Church Year is a time **for** “**definitive**” **words** (for **the final saying on things that need to be said**). While God through the prophet Malachi tries that in the end of the Old Testament, Him in Jesus does that from His last words on a cross. Before His “It is finished” (when everything had been done that was needed to make **graciously**-**being**-**saved** a possibility), the Lord Jesus dealt “**definitively**” with a man who’d shortly be dead. Where in Malachi words were said such that every one of **a whole nation** (and **the world** through them) might **listen**, recorded by Luke, words were said when **one man** finally determined to **himself** **hear them**.

**Text**

As the Old Testament went quiet for the 400 years before the first Christmas, **complacency and worldliness had settled in**. Religious exercise went through motions, but **hearts weren’t much into it** and God got **leftovers** rather than any first- and best-fruits of dedication and interest. The general **prosperity** that was entirely a gift of God taught people to wrongly wonder “**what was** (**even in worship**) **in it for them**”. Every option became weighed for **personal** **value**, and that had to be realized **very soon** and **noticeably** to gain any energy. **Taken for granted** was the “**blessedness**” they were (their covenanted sainthood as a people of Promise) … and from Whom and why that was all gifted. Tithing was non-existent, complaining was at an all-time high, divorce rates soared, and worship was only considered duty (for people and priests alike). Meanwhile, many ate incredibly well, houses and businesses were well-rebuilt since the exile, entertainment and sport abounded and ruled the day, and (again) **prosperity** mostly-selfishly-enjoyed even displayed some semblance of generosity but that prideful. “You are robbing Me”, God told them. “How have we robbed You?”, people replied, and folks **disagreed** with God as if what He said was just an **opinion** no more valid than their own.

It’s the story, though, of **some** “**coming to themselves**” and **regretting their sins**. Like the account of a prodigal son “**coming to himself**” in the discovery that his **escape was all wrong**, return wasn’t even yet imagined as possible, and in Malachi’s time only “those who feared the Lord **spoke with one another**, and **the Lord paid attention and heard them**”. And His response was to promise them that **in their remorse of sin**, **THEY WERE IN HIS REMEMBRANCE**. “A **book of remembrance was written before Him of those who feared the Lord and esteemed His name**. ‘**They shall be Mine** in the day when **I make up My treasured possession’**, says the Lord of hosts, ‘and **I will spare them as a man spares His son who serves Him**. Then **once more you shall see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve Him**.’”

That time of “making God’s treasured possession His” was **coming** **as Malachi was writing of it**, and one of the deaths that Luke 23 records was the very way that “blessedness” for anyone became possible such that the Heavenly Father could promise it. But what too many didn’t appreciate in Malachi’s prosperous time was the cost of robbing God and giving Him leftovers, yawning over His words with a general malaise about Him and being His. Jesus told women following Him to His execution site to **pay for all of that apathy**: “Do not weep for Me, but for yourselves and for your children, and when they came to the place that is called The Skull, there they **crucified Jesus**, one criminal with Him on His right and one on His left”, and mocked that situation, saying “He saved others; let Him save Himself if He is the Christ of God, His Chosen One!” Even the sign they placed above Him mocked Him yet **testified** that “This is the King of the Jews”. Other accounts say that even “the **robbers who were crucified with Him also reviled Him in the same way**” …

… until one “came to himself” in regret for sin like the prodigal son or those some (in Malachi’s time) who’d “feared the Lord and spoke with one another” in-light-of God’s words. I don’t know what it takes a dying man or some group from a nation to heed God’s words about sin and robbing Him and apathy, but the Holy Spirit and maybe death had something to do with it. And maybe for some during Novembers every year, the “Last Sunday of the Church Year” helps (with its words “trumpet blowing” a warning into people’s ears).

Jesus had said that “to make disciples of all nations, we’re to baptize those all nations in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them all to, then, observe, obey, and serve in every way that I’ve commanded you” and the seeming **exception** in the thief on the cross next to Jesus that makes **faith** more the criteria for God’s promises than anything else, here was one, though, in **covenant with God, circumcised and of the Children of Israel, and supposed-to have everything promised him but with faith and faithfulness through the Gift Malachi foretold in a Saving Sacrifice through God Son, the world’s Savior**. That man, though, first had grown apathetic of all of that, a thief and, first, joined the condemnation of Jesus but changed, softened, and was opened to the graciousness of forgiveness won by that very death that was occurring next to him. The thief “**came to himself**” in remorse, repentance, and a recognition of the Savior **just in time** (before dying, taking last breath and, then, facing judgment). He professed a faith in **Who-it-was Who could give Him life even in death** … and He **relished the gift of that in that hour**.

And he could have been **any one of us** and is on our deathbed but that could have been us on a cross. He was a thief, but **just a thief, and how many of us have robbed others of quality time or taken an excess of what we ought not to have, demanded what others or God maybe should have gotten instead of us, robbed God of some remainder of a tithing 10th or Him of quality and energetic time from us or effort or prayers or our care and concern for others on His behalf**. Roads got lined with the tied-up or nailed-up **examples of anybody** to encourage the paying of taxes and submission to their governing … and these two could have been grabbed from the streets or their homes (maybe just crucified to clear-out an over-crowded jail where they sat for drunken disorderliness).

But this one **confessed to the One he had-to** … and **did-so in time**. He asked the other: “Do **you** not fear God even while you are under the same sentence of condemnation. And we **justly**, for we are receiving the **due reward of our deeds**” (words we shouldn’t forget on our deathbeds); but “**this Man has done nothing wrong**” (and don’t forget those words on your deathbed either).

And, then, with words which will change because of what he quickly gets offered right after saying them, **this one** begs as any “coming to himself” should: “Jesus, remember **ME** when you come into Your kingdom”. Immediately Jesus said: “Truly**, I say to you**, **today you will be with Me in Paradise**.” ….

You should know that **this man** did not die the very same death that Jesus did. He was right when he acknowledged Jesus’ **innocence** and, yet, probably couldn’t have ever imagined the degree to which **guilt got to be the Lord’s alone to carry**. Death for **ALL GUILT** of the **Divine Innocent One** meant much more than just a stopped breath and heartbeat … more than just, even, the torture of how whippings and crucifixion-deaths happen. It meant the **proper-wrath-of-God-upon-sin forced upon the One who didn’t do it** **… blood precious enough, though, to** **ACCOUNT FOR ALL OF IT**. It took the **Hellish death of God’s Son**.

**Application**

You and I must “**come to ourselves**” **at some point** “**definitively**”. No doubt, we **have** in lots of ways so far (and confession today was hopefully one of those moments as **we** **“spoke to each other”**), but our “**today**” will one day come for “definitive” considerations, thoughts and words.

And **after that** (**after** **that kind of honesty, concern, and repentance** knowing that **our death is “just, but Jesus had done nothing wrong”**), **then** He’s the very One who has words for us that He wants us to immediately hear and rejoice over. When our plea desperately is “Jesus, remember me”, then His Father’s Promised remembrance of baptized believers’, **our names** in the book that He says He looks at, gives us **this comfort upon prayer:** “**JESUS, REMEMBER ME … WHICH YOU DO AS YOU PROMISED TO ALL YOUR SONS AND DAUGHTERS WHO SERVE YOUR FATHER**”. May the last (“**definitive**”) words you hear in any Church Year or any day of your earthly life, including your last, be: “**JESUS, REMEMBER ME … WHICH YOU DO AS YOU PROMISED TO ALL YOUR SONS AND DAUGHTERS WHO SERVE YOUR FATHER**”.

In +Jesus’ name. Amen.