

*Luke 23: 33-43*

*When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. Then Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.' And they cast lots to divide his clothing. And the people stood by, watching; but the leaders scoffed at him, saying, 'He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!' The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine, 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.' One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, 'Are you not the Messiah? 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 have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong.' Then he said, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.' He replied, 'Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.'*

+++++

This strikes me: from two crosses, we hear these words -

Jesus says, "Father forgive them,  
they know not what they do."

And THEN, only after that,  
another man, hanging on a second cross,  
says, "Jesus, remember me,  
when you come into your kingdom."

Two things said -  
one about forgiveness,  
and one asking to be remembered.

What's the connection between them:  
being forgiven,  
and being remembered?

Would you even *want* Jesus to remember you,  
if you weren't first reassured  
that you'd be forgiven?  
Would you want to be remembered by Jesus,  
if everything you've ever done -  
the cruel as well as the kind -  
were perfectly preserved, enshrined forever  
never to be undone,  
never to be forgiven?

Or would you want to hide....

+++++

Brendan (spoken from choir loft): Father, forgive them, they know not what they do.

Hannah (sung from choir loft):

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

+++++

Other things *were* said

on that cross-filled hill –  
the cruel jaunts and jeers of life:  
“Jesus, if you’re really so great,  
save yourself;  
if you’re really a KING,  
act like it  
and *lord* your power over us now!  
Come down from that cross.....  
HA ha ha...”

People who try to do  
the right thing in life  
are always met with jaunts and jeers.

What else is new?  
It’s horrible, and painful,  
but there’s nothing new about that.

What is new,  
what is astonishing,  
is to have someone say,  
“Father, forgive them,  
they do not know what they are doing.” And then to have a request  
that’s answered right away:  
“Jesus, remember me,  
when you come into your kingdom.”  
Today, Today (!)  
you’ll be with me in paradise.  
Now *that’s* worth exploring.  
Forgiveness.

Being remembered always in Love.

Hannah sings:

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

+++++

Remembering surrounds us this week.

Here at King's Chapel

we are blessed with many traditions  
and memories –  
we cherish them,  
and repeat them year after year.

They hold us,  
these memories and traditions.

Though other pieces of our life may change,  
some things remain stable.

So on Thanksgiving Sunday

We always read the Governor's Thanksgiving Proclamation.  
And we sing our well known hymns.

We know the tunes;  
we may even know the words by heart.

Tradition and memories are evoked  
that hold us.

We remember on Thanksgiving Sunday.

+++++

But other memories

also pursued us this week.

Friday was the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary

of President Kennedy's assassination,  
and across the airwaves  
our whole nation remembered.

The Boston Globe

reprinted the front pages  
as they had appeared in 1963,  
and we were hurled back into the events.

For any of us

who were alive then,  
we remember specifics – we can't help it.

They're seared in our memories.

As 9/11 is for today's generation,  
as Pearl Harbor was for the generation before,  
the assassination of President Kennedy  
was a defining moment  
for my generation of Americans.

I had just turned seven  
a few weeks before,  
and still see  
the Public Announcement system box  
perched high on the pale green wall  
of my second grade classroom,  
because that is where I stared  
when the principal came on so suddenly,  
so unexpectedly,  
to announce  
that President Kennedy  
had been shot.

On Friday, here at King's Chapel,  
we marked that moment,  
when the President died 50 years ago,  
by tolling our bell 50 times.

Bostonians have particularly remembered –  
Jack Kennedy was born in Brookline,  
attended college in Cambridge,  
and listed his voting address as Beacon Hill,  
just three blocks from here,  
over the Capitol Coffee Shop,  
at the corner of Bowdoin  
and Ashburton Place.

Kennedy was our state's US Senator  
and then our native son President.

This city -- riven by a history  
of Catholics denied power,  
then rising to power –  
was fully enmeshed  
in Jack Kennedy's journey  
to the White House.

Not everyone rejoiced  
when he was elected,  
but no one was indifferent.

This week, feelings of pride  
and horror and shame  
have coursed through Bostonians – those who cared or those who  
didn't care -

when the President  
was gunned down in Dallas.

Remembering.

+++++

Hannah( sung):      Jesus, remember me,  
                                 when you come into your kingdom.  
                                 Jesus, remember me,  
                                 when you come into your kingdom.

+++++

I've felt uneasy  
among the competing story lines this week.  
Whipsawed between  
an upcoming joyful national holiday  
premiered on bountiful food  
and warm family scenes,  
and the scenes of mourning:  
a young widow behind a black veil  
holding the hands  
of her two little children.  
In this service today,  
we bolted from our powerful Introit,  
mourning death,  
into our opening Thanksgiving hymn,  
We Gather Together.  
In our scripture readings,  
we're required to hold together,  
at one time,  
a God worthy of exaltation,  
declared in the psalm  
and the limp, agonized body of Jesus  
tortured on the cross?  
Why are we even reading about crucifixion  
on Thanksgiving? Who cares if it's the final  
Sunday of the Christian year,  
with Advent beginning next Sunday?  
Can't we stick with  
the more upbeat  
Thanksgiving theme?  
How can we remember all these things  
at the same time?

No – we'd rather close our eyes,  
and cover our ears...  
It's almost too much to bear,  
this remembering of everything  
all at once,  
a cacophony of pain and joy.  
It makes no sense!

+++++

...Just like our lives, sometimes,  
batted back and forth  
between pain and joy.

Like our lives,  
that sometimes seem  
not to make any sense at all....  
...UNLESS there is forgiveness.

Unless the pain  
of what we have done,  
and the pain  
of what has been done to us,  
can be healed,  
so that the life of joy,  
for which we are made,  
can become ours again.

How could that ever happen?

+++++

In Jesus' kind of forgiveness,  
you forgive the one who hurts you,  
because they really didn't know  
what they were doing.

In Jesus' kind of forgiveness,  
we assume  
that there is much  
we never know:  
I don't know everything  
about the person who hurt me  
The person who hurt me  
didn't know everything about me.  
And I don't even know myself fully,

and they don't know themselves fully.

There's so much we never know.

Love is the practice  
of carefully and gently  
trying to learn more about myself  
and the other person.  
And when we can't know it all,  
love then imagines  
with generosity  
what may have been behind  
what I did  
and what they did.  
Love assumes the best,  
not the worst.  
Love seeks to understand.

+++++

How many times  
has it happened to you?  
The times when I savor  
my hurt feelings,  
and invest energy  
in excoriating the other person's behavior –  
sometimes out loud,  
sometimes in my own mind.  
I am *so* right  
and he/she/they  
are *so* wrong!  
I won't forgive,  
I can't let this just slide over me!

.....And then I learn  
another nugget of the story  
I hadn't known earlier.

The dry cleaners AGAIN  
do a lousy job with my blouses,  
the cuffs emerging with huge wrinkles  
ironed into them  
instead of pressed smooth,  
and I'm livid  
to pay good money  
for this incompetence –

until I learn that the store owner's wife,  
    who usually irons the women's blouses,  
    is dying in the hospital.  
The husband  
    has been using the men's shirt press  
    to do everything,  
    rushing through all the laundry  
    so he can get back to sit with her  
    for at least a little while  
    before visiting hours end....

Father, forgive me,  
    I didn't know what I was doing  
    when I got so angry...  
    I didn't know the whole story.

+++++

Steven Covey calls it a "paradigm shift" –  
    when the way you've looked at something  
    completely changes.  
I quote from his bestseller,  
The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People.  
Says Covey:

*...one Sunday morning on a subway  
in New York,  
people were sitting quietly –  
some reading newspapers,  
some lost in thought,  
some resting with their eyes closed.  
It was a calm, peaceful scene.*

*Then suddenly,  
a man and his children  
entered the subway car.*

*The children  
were so loud and rambunctious  
that instantly  
the whole climate changed.*

*The man sat down next to me  
and closed his eyes,  
apparently oblivious to the situation.*



*The children were yelling back and forth,  
throwing things,  
even grabbing people's papers.  
It was very disturbing.  
And yet,  
the man sitting next to me  
did nothing.*

*It was difficult not to feel irritated.  
I could not believe  
that he could be so insensitive  
as to let his children run wild like that  
and do nothing about it,  
taking no responsibility at all.  
It was easy to see  
that everyone else on the subway  
felt irritated, too.  
So finally,  
with what I felt was unusual patience  
and restraint,  
I turned to him and said,  
"Sir, your children  
are really disturbing  
a lot of people.  
I wonder if  
you couldn't control them  
a little more?"*

*The man lifted his gaze  
as if to come  
to a consciousness of the situation  
for the first time  
and said softly,  
"Oh, you're right,  
I guess I should do something about it.  
We just came from the hospital  
where their mother died  
about an hour ago.  
I don't know what to think,  
and I guess they don't know  
how to handle it either."*

*Can you imagine what I felt  
at that moment?  
My paradigm shifted.  
Suddenly I saw things differently,*

*and because I saw differently,  
I thought differently,  
I felt differently,  
I behaved differently.  
My irritation vanished.  
I didn't have to worry  
about controlling my attitude  
or my behavior...  
Feelings of sympathy and compassion  
flowed freely...  
Everything changed in an instant (pp. 30-31).*

According to Covey,  
we can try to work  
bit by bit on our behaviors –  
trying to be more patient  
or to control our temper  
when irritations arise in life.  
Or we can fundamentally change  
the way we see others' actions  
toward us,  
a paradigm shift.

Like Jesus did,  
we can assume  
that we don't know the whole story.  
Assume that the people  
who have hurt us  
did not know what they are doing. And then we *can* forgive.

It's a choice.  
Forgive in the way Jesus did –  
by taking it for granted  
that we won't know everything –  
or hold the grudges.

+++++

Take Jesus' own situation.  
For Jesus, it would have been  
supremely easy to make the case  
that the people who scorned him,  
who tortured him,  
who ordered his death  
knew EXACTLY what they were doing.  
His religious rivals

had been plotting this day  
for some time.  
The Roman authorities  
heard the arguments on both sides,  
had the power to stop the execution,  
but chose to move it forward instead.  
The soldiers who mocked Jesus  
weren't *required*  
by their job to do so –  
they could have stood by silent,  
rather than render the horrific scene  
even more inhumane.  
The first man on an adjoining cross  
who derided Jesus  
could have asked to be remembered,  
as the second man did.  
But instead the first was scathing,  
taking the same part  
as the worst accusers of Jesus,  
sneering at him.

But despite all this intentionality,  
all this planning,  
all the pain people chose – CHOSE –  
to inflict on him,  
Jesus took this stance:  
Father, forgive them,  
they know not what they do.  
Not really. Not really.

They don't really understand me,  
and what I was trying to do,  
Jesus is saying.  
They don't really understand  
themselves fully,  
and why they are acting so viciously.  
They're better than that, God –  
they really are.  
They have wonderful potential, still.  
Forgive them, God!

+++++

We hardly ever know  
what is really happening  
in the lives of those

with whom we're battling.  
We hardly ever know  
what's happening in our own.

It's too painful to go there,  
to remember....

But those who are deepest  
along their spiritual path  
make this their practice:  
to understand as very best they can,  
what is happening in their own lives.  
And to learn, as best they can,  
about what is happening  
in the other person's.

Not to fix the other person.  
Or correct them.  
But to understand more.

And when they still can't understand,  
they are generous,  
and assume the best.

This doesn't mean that  
we always need  
to put ourselves in the line of abuse.  
We protect ourselves when needed.  
But we operate from a different paradigm  
of more understanding and generosity,  
not solely from reflexive blame,  
unhealed hurt, and fury.

+++++

The most powerful healing  
that I've experienced,  
and that I've seen in others,  
always has required this painful work  
of remembering,  
for both people who have been hurt.

I begin by remembering  
my own hard times.  
I do "my work,"  
of trying to understand myself,

and the ways I've been hurt  
in the past,  
the pains that keep coming up  
again and again,  
and that still today  
trigger my anger or sadness  
or defensiveness.  
Remembering this painful past  
helps me better understand  
why sometimes I'm so hurt  
when someone attacks or belittles me.  
I learn to ask, What's really going on?  
Why can I let *some* things  
run off my back,  
but other things make me *seethe*?

Is it because of times from my past  
when someone didn't understand  
how hard I was working,  
of all that I *had* done,  
and only complained about the few things  
I just hadn't been able to get to yet?  
Is it that old feeling of,  
"IT'S NOT FAIR"  
rising up within me again?  
What old memory within me  
is being evoked by the person today,  
whom I find so irritating?

But that's not all.  
I also try to do the same  
for the other person –  
in Jesus' words, "my enemy"  
that I'm supposed to love  
and forgive.  
Can I imagine, Why would they say that,  
do that?  
What's wrong with them?  
Can't they see that....

Maybe they can't see, says Jesus.  
Forgive them,  
because they don't really know  
what they are doing....  
Don't really, in the deepest sense,  
understand why they're acting

that way,  
don't really understand  
why you are so vulnerable.  
Inadvertently we've kicked up a wasp's nest  
that was buried among the forest leaves,  
and now we're both being stung.

Remembering. Forgiving.  
They go hand in glove.

+++++

This Thanksgiving,  
we probably all  
have at least a glancing fantasy  
that we'll get to re-enact  
the scene painted by Norman Rockwell.  
Many of us *will* have turkey,  
and we may gather with family or friends,  
but few of us will have the Rockwellian,  
idyllic experience.

There will be memories around the table with us,  
some delightful, but some painful.

We'll remember someone  
who used to be there,  
but is now gone,  
and a hollow emptiness  
will fill our chest.

We may yet again  
be offered a particular dish  
that we've *always* detested,  
and that will remind us again  
how poorly others notice *our* desires,  
but seem adept  
at getting their own met.

We will be challenged  
by the ridiculous opinions or habits  
of a sibling or a neighbor,  
and feel a rising need  
to stand up  
for truth and justice again!

All of which means  
we'll have a grand opportunity  
to hear Jesus' words:  
"Father, forgive them,

they know not what they do.”  
We'll have a chance to *hear* the words, friends –  
you don't need to  
piously utter them out loud!

But do hear them –  
for you and for those around you.

*We're* forgiven,  
because we don't really know  
what we're doing.  
So are they.

Because if we weren't,  
we'd have good reason  
to be anxious  
about how *we* will be remembered,  
when it is our place at the table  
that stands empty.

We all want  
to be remembered with love.  
It's our gift as humans –  
that we can give love  
and receive it.  
But we all mess up,  
maybe even as badly  
as those who strung up Jesus  
that day long ago on a hill.

Do not be afraid, we are told.  
Give thanks for a God  
whose love never ends.  
For a God who always –  
astonishingly –  
forgives us.

And with that reassurance –  
that *we* are forgiven –  
we can dare ask,  
“Jesus, remember me, too...”.

Forgiveness and remembering intertwined.

Hannah begins singing, walking down center aisle toward the chancel

Jesus, remember me,  
when you come into your kingdom  
Jesus, remember me,  
When you come into your kingdom.....

Choir joins, harmonizing – Jesus, remember me,  
when you come into your kingdom  
Jesus, remember me,  
When you come into your kingdom....

Hannah leads congregation in singing, with choir:  
Jesus, remember me,  
when you come into your kingdom  
Jesus, remember me,  
When you come into your kingdom

Jesus, remember me,  
when you come into your kingdom  
Jesus, remember me,  
When you come into your kingdom

Amen.