

## Colossians 1:11-20

11 being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, 12 and giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light. 13 For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

15 The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.

16 For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. 17 He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. 18 And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. 19 For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, 20 and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

## Luke 23:32-43

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.”

## Father forgive

## Colossians 1:11-20; Luke 23:32-43

Today in the Anglican calendar is the Last Sunday before Advent but known now as Christ the King. This was something introduced in 1925 by Pope Pius the eleventh, who felt that at this point in the church year the focus should be on Jesus. He said this: “if to Christ our Lord is given all power in heaven and on earth; if all people, purchased by his precious blood, are subjected to his dominion; if this power embraces all people, it must be clear that not one of our faculties is exempt... He must reign in our minds, wills, hearts and bodies”.

I think this is not just a particular point of view in a particular church, it is actually what Jesus asks of those who would say they’re his followers. It’s interesting that the reading today has an account of the exchange between Jesus and two criminals crucified on each side of him on the cross. This not only shows us what he asks of us but as importantly what he doesn’t ask.

Firstly though we’re reminded that Jesus, as far as the authorities were concerned, was found to be a common criminal and treated as such.

Depending on where you are in the world today this could be your fate as a believer. Sometimes we get disheartened, if not at being persecuted, because we're really not, then at the sheer lack of interest in our message. But Jesus might well say what do we expect, given what He had to endure. We live in a bit of a moral vacuum in this country today, in a culture which has largely rejected the teachings of Jesus, but we really shouldn't allow it to get us down. We might feel quite comfortable as long as the church is part of the established order, but there's no guarantee that it will last. We have to expect trouble. In John 16:33 Jesus says this *In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.*

The crowd in Jerusalem had all changed their tune since the week before when everyone was cheering him into the city. The people just watched the show. The rulers, and the soldiers, who you'd have expected to remain neutral, mocked him.

*Let him save himself if He is God's Messiah  
If you're King of the Jews, save yourself*

There's a clear echo here of Satan's words to Jesus in the wilderness: *If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread.* When it comes to the crunch, no one is prepared to defend him...

Someone who has done literally no wrong whatsoever. Pilate as an independent investigator finds him innocent, but washes his hands of the whole thing. This is the human condition, the current against which we're expected to swim. Prove to us that you're God, Jesus of Nazareth! Not that any proof would have convinced anyone. The miracles made no difference – they called for more but then carried on their lives as if they had not happened. Remember how 9 out of 10 lepers who were healed never returned to give thanks? The 1% equates to the percentage of the population who are in church. We're an unbelieving generation now, as they were then.

The exchange with the two criminals on the cross is very revealing. As I said it reveals what Jesus expects from us but also what he does not. He taught his followers that if you cling to your life you will lose it, but if you lay down your life for others you will save it. As Pope Pius said, Jesus must reign – must be Lord of – our minds, wills, hearts and bodies. We must surrender to him. He doesn't save himself. He surrenders his life.

We're asked to do the same. So what do we see here that he does *not* ask us to do?

The first criminal mocks Jesus. The second one says to him, “*Don’t you fear God, since you’re under the same sentence? We’re punished justly, for we’re getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.*” Then he said, “*Remember me when you come into your Kingdom*” Remember me is a common Old Testament prayer— Hannah (1 Sam 1.11), Nehemiah (Neh 5.19), Job (Job 14.13), the Psalmist (Ps 25.7) and Jeremiah (Jer 15.15) all similarly cried out to God “Remember me!”.

And Jesus replies “*Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.*”

What did the thief do to get into paradise? Did he attend church all his life? No. Did he pray faithfully to God every morning? No. Did he feed the poor? No. None of these.

There was a survey recently where 7,000 churchgoers were asked whether they agreed with this statement: ‘*The way to be accepted by God is to try sincerely to live a good life*’. More than 60% agreed with that statement. ‘*The way to be accepted by God is to try sincerely to live a good life*’.

And more than 60% were wrong  
What’s our response?

Yes we should absolutely lead a good life. Yes, we are called to good works and we should absolutely live to serve God by loving and serving others.

But if we think that by doing all this we will be accepted by God we’re wrong. The thief on the cross proves this. He just calls out to Jesus and as he dies is instantly with Him in paradise.

All that we do as believers must only ever be a **response** to what Jesus has done for us. **Our lives of service are not what is necessary to be accepted by God.** If we just repent, and cry out to him, and believe, like the thief, we are accepted and loved, unconditionally. If we really understand this it should revolutionise our lives. I pray that the Holy Spirit gives us understanding.

As Jesus is put on the cross he says “*Father, forgive them, for they don’t know what they’re doing.*”

He’s not even forgiving them because they’re sorry! They’re not sorry.

He says they don’t know what they’re doing.

If you and I knew what we were doing we would know that we cannot ever save ourselves by doing good.

Our only chance is that Jesus remembers us.  
And he will. Amen.