“Will You Re-Member Me?”

A Sermon by Rev. Rachel Wildman

Christ the King Sunday, 2016

St. Paul’s Episcopal Church, Bedford MA

 Scripture: Luke 23:33-43

Well, here we are, at Christ the King Sunday. Here we are, raising up as *our* King one who suffers and dies at the hands of the unjust, while on-lookers mock and scoff. Here we are, raising up as *our* King one whose vision of inclusion and equity is silenced by those who cling to the power of business as usual.

PAUSE.

I’m going to be honest. I hear this passage in the context of the past many weeks and I can’t help but see myself as one of Jesus’ loyal followers and those on the other side of this divisive presidential election as the jeering crowds. I can’t help but feel the strong swell of condemnation for the mockers and scoffers from the other side whose vote seems to me so clearly to be a vote to silence the prophetic witness to the forgotten and oppressed that Jesus, *our* King, lived and died for.

I imagine that some of you can’t help but do this either—whichever candidate you voted for.

And so then, by mapping ourselves and those with whom we differ into this most heinous scene in the way that seems so very natural—the way that resonates so well in our climate of accusation and fear--here we are, on Christ the King Sunday, tempted into using the cross as an instrument of division. Here we are, with the opportunity to use the cross as a justification for our denunciation, even our hatred, of those we see as having erected it.

The people of God on both sides are suffering— those Clinton supporters who voted for her with an understanding of that vote as a vote for the marginalized, are feeling a poignant vulnerability. Those Trump supporters who voted for him in good faith and in love with an alternate understanding of *that* vote as a vote for the margnalized continue to be lumped with all Trump voters and vilified. More than likely, we are both represented here, in this sanctuary. Each of us may be feeling condemned by factions of our country, perhaps even feeling silenced to some extent within this, our beloved church community, each of us encouraged by the civic goings-on around us to allow the cross to be jammed down right in the middle of the people of God—a blockade between sides.

But on November 20th, 2016 in the face of all that has transpired these past many weeks, here we must be on Christ the King Sunday, raising up as *our* King one who in his suffering calls for forgiveness and proclaims reconciliation. One, who in his suffering, receives those who turn to him with the promise of acting on their behalf, of nurturing them to the fullness that is Paradise.

*Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Jesus replied, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise."*

This is the Gospel—the liberating Good News of God in Christ. Today—right here in our prayers, right here as we pass peace to each other—right here as we gather around the rail and are nourished by Christ, himself—we will be taken from the pain of being dis-membered from each other, and be re-membered—brought back together into a healing community of hope.

Some of you may recall that one of my favorite linguistic tidbits is that the biblical use of the word remember is not just a bringing to mind—a review of a memory. In the Hebrew and Christian scriptures, the word remember is a far more active word. It is to call to mind someone in such a way as to act on their behalf.

This is what Jesus promises to the criminal on the cross next to him. Jesus will act on his behalf, and not in some end-time when the Kingdom has fully come to fruition…but, TODAY.

This is our liberating Good News, too. When we open our arms, turn ourselves to God, and ask to be remembered by Christ, Christ will act on our behalf too…TODAY….putting us back together.

In a few minutes we will come to the table. And as we re-member Christ in our sharing of the bread and wine, we too, this very morning, will be invited by Him to be re-membered, ourselves. We will be invited to be actively cared for by Christ at this table in such a way that we are re-membered anew into a loving, compassionate community that carefully holds different perspectives. We will be invited to be re-membered into a community that allows for the possibility that prayerful discernment can lead to different understandings of how we are each uniquely called to love…and that can engage in formational conversations about how our differing actions and perspectives may not only bring each other joy, but cause each other pain.

By no means am I condoning racism, mysogyny, religious intolerance, or xenophobia. We will continue to be a community that stands in resistance to them, proclaims the dignity of every human being, and fights for justice and peace within our nation and the world. What I am promoting is a commitment to the power of Christian community—the incarnate Body of Christ—to hold together that which the world would like to tear apart. To promote in our families, at our workplaces, in these walls, the clinging to of relationship, the seeking to understand each other’s motivations, the respectful debate and sharing of information, and above all the looking exhaustively in each other—in every other the country over-- for the eye of Christ, the hand of Christ, the ears of Christ, the voice of Christ, the foot of Christ that must be joined with ours to re-member the Christ’s own body at this most critical time. What I am promoting is not necessarily unity of discernment or action among us, but unity of purpose.

We have the opportunity to allow ourselves to be knit together into one organism of community whose unified purpose is to help each other discover what particular role each of us is called to in bringing the Kingdom to fruition. We are all here—each hearing a call by Christ to this table. What we are *purposeful* in enacting as a community together in this moment will be a powerful witness to our local community and the world about what the Christian Way is about.

In these days ahead, may the cross, our guiding light of forgiveness and reconciliation, of expansive mercy, and of piercing love…may *this* cross *go* *before* us, not *come* *between* us. AMEN.