

Sermon from Last Sunday of Pentecost, Nov. 20, 2016

Jesus, Remember Me
The Rev. Dan Warren

Jesus, remember me, when you come into your kingdom. The setting is the cross, on the outskirts of Jerusalem. Two criminals hang on either side of Jesus. One says, if you're the Messiah, the King, show your power. Call in your armies. Get us out of here. The other says, "Jesus remember me when you come into your kingdom." Jesus response, to the one who asks his companionship? "Today, you will be with me in Paradise." You are *already* with me in Paradise, we are living in God's presence and promise, as we speak; God is with us here, now- in our suffering and struggle.

Our bishop has given us a book to read, called Dignity. I usually like to give examples from person to person events I've been through directly. But this account from Dignity stands for many experiences I've had, and maybe some of yours too. At a conference, an Israeli man, Don, and a Palestinian woman, Rahina, were part of a group discussing the way Palestinians were treated at border crossings with Israel. Rahina, the Palestinian woman, sat nearly motionless, with only her eyes shifting back and forth between those who spoke. Her Palestinian friend said, at one point, to the Israeli, "If you think we're not treated like *dirt* at the checkpoints, dress up like an Arab and try making the crossing yourself!"

The argument continued, getting nowhere. The moderator was about to intervene when Rahina interrupted the men and asked to speak. The room went silent. She looked at Don, the Israeli, and without an ounce of judgment in her voice said to him, "I can see you're having trouble believing my colleague. Let me tell you a story that might help you understand what he is trying to convey."

When I was about six years old, my grandfather told me we were going to Jerusalem to visit a friend he hadn't seen in many years. I remember thinking my grandfather was old. I wondered if he wanted to see his friend to say good-bye. This thought made me sad; yet I was excited to be with him, because I loved my grandfather. And many others did in our community of Ramallah. People young and old came to him for advice. He was a reconciler.

When we approached the border crossing, a young Israeli soldier asked my grandfather to get out of the car. I was terrified. The soldier carried a big gun. I didn't know what was happening. I saw my grandfather trying to explain something to the soldier, but the soldier accused him of lying and started yelling at him. I couldn't believe it. I jumped out of the car, went to the soldier, and said to him, "What are you doing? Don't you know who he is? He is my grandfather. You can't talk to him that way!"

The room went silent. Rahima put her face in her hands and sobbed.
Don was the first to speak. He turned to Rahima and said how sorry he was- that she and her grandfather were so humiliated. He was trembling as he explained how difficult it was for him to take in her story. "As an Israeli, he said, I believe we are good people, fighting a painful war we have to fight in order to maintain our identity as a Jewish people.I have trouble taking in your experience; *and* keeping my sense of who I am. The way I understand myself, and my people, is causing great suffering for your people."

Don allowed himself to be vulnerable in front of his fellow Israelis, and in front of Palestinians at the table. All were speechless. There was nothing left to say. Words do not belong at such sacred moments.... The Palestinians walked up to him and shook his hand. They left the room together.

You might have heard me remark two weeks ago about my visit to Trinity Church in Lewiston for the institution of their new priest. Trinity is on the corner of Kennedy Park. It was a Sunday afternoon, a sunny day in the 50's. There were a 150 people or so, in Kennedy Park, playing basketball or sitting on benches. Not one of them white. Most were Somali I assume. At another corner of the park is the Lewiston Police Dept. Living in apartments nearby are many whites, old and young. How do we live so that black lives matter, blue lives matter, and white lives matter; so that law and order, and mercy and compassion live together?

I had one fine example, if I may move across the river, in the person of the Auburn police chief. I was at a conference table on the potential renovation of a house in our neighborhood, so that single mothers would have a place to live. There was concern about "undesirables." The chief, Philip Crowell, was the most articulate to speak on the benefits for single mothers and supporting them for the care of

their children, and just how to go about it. Black, blue, and white came together in his compassion.

And here we sit. Two blocks from town hall and the police station, a block from Hannaford's, next to the Franklin School, in the midst of housing similar to Kennedy Square. We could say, with one hanging near Jesus, "Get us out of here. Make us big and powerful, in some other location." Or, we could say with the one hanging on the other side, "Jesus, remember me, when you come into your kingdom." Be present to me, and those gathered here. Give us promise.

Jesus goes through the cross, not around it, to show us the way to new life on the other side. May we have the grace to receive and follow, to give thanks that we are right where we are meant to be.