

Christ the King, 2, 2007

November 25, 2007

Luke 23: 33-43

Title: Save the Date

Grace and peace to you from God our father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

This Friday there is going to be a groundbreaking. People will gather at a plot of ground on Green Level Road and with shovel in hand dig into earth. After years of plans and intentions, pipe dreams, hopes dashed, the Serving Cup's 6 apartments for 12 adults with developmental disabilities will be birthed.

Ground breakings are full of great hope! Cause people come together to set apart a piece of God's good earth for a purpose. A home, a church, a business, a park, a hospital....you name it....they deserve a ceremonial breaking of the ground. For encapsulated therein is a succinct way to

Identify the purpose of that place.

When you break ground for a church building as we did here for our first sanctuary in 1986, somewhere under this table on the ground the founding disciples of this church marked a cross on the ground and prayed:

May this be a place where your glory dwells and where
Your way is revealed in Word and Sacrament. May your
Gracious blessing descend like the dew from heaven upon
This place and upon all who shall gather here to worship you.

There is going to be a ground breaking this Friday.

On Friday. On Friday on a hill outside of Jerusalem the ground was broken. It was a different, far different kind of digging into the earth. There spades turned soil to plant death. To kill off three persons whose lives deserved to end. Two criminals and an upcountry messiah named Jesus.

The ground was broken and he Jesus hung between two criminals. There is the groundbreaking prayer: Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.

That prayer Luke 23:34 is left out in some early Bible manuscripts.

Take it out of the script. Take it out of Jesus' mouth. Don't allow
It to be passed along that at this ground breaking we hear
Our Lord forgive the unrepentant abusers who put him
To death.

I am sympathetic to those who wanted to sanitize the crucifixion. Forgive
that criminal who wanted to be remembered? Yes! By all means! Give
Him a promise that not only speaks of his future—paradise—but declare it
Today. You bet! The repentant sinner deserves his place!

“Jesus, remember me, when you come into your
kingdom!”
The sweet, sweet words of love—‘Truly, I tell you,
Today you will be with me in Paradise!’

I get that. But forgiveness, blanket forgiveness to those who have
wrongfully accused you, wrongfully tried you, wrongfully mocked you,
Took your clothes, derided you with the sign on your cross

This is the King of the Jews!

It's not the first time words have been changed. When that rogue younger
brother Jacob has to finally face his brother Esau—Jacob had taken Esau's
birthright and stolen the blessing reserved for the older brother,

Jacob has to meet this brother and he expects a conflict,
So he puts 400 men out front, but Esau forgives Jacob.
The story in Genesis says that Esau kissed Jacob, a sign of
Love, but some changed it.
They didn't kiss—Esau bit his brother.
That's what you are supposed to do when someone
Takes advantage---get even!!

Take out the words—Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they
are doing! Show what they did to my Lord—

The leaders scoffed, the soldiers mocked, one criminal derided.
Focus on that.
How convenient it would be to strip the Cross of Jesus of it's
Power—as Colossians says:

God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things...by making
Peace through the blood of the cross.

Make peace with only those like the one repentant sinner.

Isn't that what fueled the crusades? The infidels were the
Criminal on the wrong side of Jesus...the one who derided him.
And it was our responsibility, we criminals on the right side of Jesus
To be rid of them.

When The Passion of Christ movie came out some Jews
Were quite concerned about it. They feared based on the
History of Passion Plays in Europe that this
Movie would bring Christians again to their doors—seeing in them
The ones who crucified Jesus—it's in the text the mockers, scoffers,
Deriders, crucifiers—they are outside the realm of God's mercy.

Rich Lischer writes about our culture as increasingly argumentative. We
have this myth about ourselves that we are a melting pot, but
More and more we define ourselves by difference. Who we are not—

I know I'm white, because I know I'm not black
I know I'm a peace loving Christian and you are a jihah loving
Muslim
I know I'm a Mayflower Pilgrim and you are an immigrant
Who likely isn't here legally.
Our identity is defined by what we are not.

Father, forgive them for they know not what they do!

This is the picture we are to hold up.
The church holds up and witnesses to this picture.

Jesus hangs between two criminals—one who seeks him; one who rejects
him! And as tempted as we are to pare this picture down, to divide up this
picture, to invite only certain ones to the ground breaking—we are to hold it
together....Jesus in the middle between

Show this picture to the family in conflict.
Take it to the hospital, to the group home, to the high school

where the gang members are rumbling. Show it to those who believe worship or education is of only one kind.
Show it to the ones who never look deeply into their own hearts.

On a hill outside Jerusalem ground was broken to crucify. Here is the heart of God for this world, for this world, for this home, for this church, for this nation, for this household.

Christ the King—a king who didn't save himself, but saved others.
His very name is consistent with his calling --Jesus means He Saves.

In view of who calls us to life,
We are to strive toward reconciliation. Point toward this picture even amidst our failure to live it. We may not feel reconciled but God breaks through
To us, again and again.

Lewis Smedes in his book *Forgive and Forget* breaks ground on forgiveness. He provides an anatomy of forgiveness. Suggesting four events on the way to forgiveness.

Hurt—the breach, the wrong
Hate—anger and righteous indignation
Healing—letting go, the mystery of grace
Reconciliation—reaching to the criminal next to us

Whatever the steps and stages in view of this picture the spirit of Christ bends us toward the kiss, not the bite, toward the one between two criminals, not just one. Here is God's groundbreaking news for new life.

Save the date!! Brothers and sisters, save that date.

Amen.

