

Good Friday 2010  
“Jesus, Remember Me”  
Luke 23

Esse Quam Videri – do you know what that is? Esse Quam Videri -- is North's Carolina's State Motto adopted in 1893. Most North Carolinians are down to earth and for most of us it is a good description. To be sure there is a politician or a basketball coach or two who paint us Tar Heels in a different light. But in general this motto sums us up well. What we are is more important to us than what we think we are. Esse Quam Videri -- To Be Rather Than To Seem.

Now, I run the risk of laying Holy Week next to the state motto of my adoptive North Carolina as though they were on a spiritual par with one another (they are not).

Regardless the risk, I think there is a richness in that motto -- Esse Quam Videri -- that we ought not miss. If we are to follow Jesus to the cross and make witness to his work there, it strikes me that we are supposed to bring what we are (being) with us instead of leaving it at home, hoping that God will bless what we wish we were or pretend to be (seeming).

It strikes me that Holy Week, and Good Friday itself, is the essence -- the being -- of the story of Jesus. If Jesus only intended to seem like the Messiah, then go to Jerusalem he does not. Being means that pretending is over. The cross looms. Jesus goes. Being the Messiah trumps seeming the Messiah and we gain grace. Jesus passes the test -- he is what he said he was.

And because he was what he said, the person closest to him on the cross, a fellow death row inmate, the person who could look into his eyes in the moments before his death says – “Jesus, remember me, when you come into your kingdom.” The ground zero witness saw the Lordship of Christ in the servant suffering on the cross.

Jesus, remember me. That is what he said.

If there is anything good about Good Friday, this day of darkest action and deepest need, then it is this: that Jesus Christ, arrested, beaten, scourged, and crucified trusted God beyond our understandings.

God is ever pointing us back to the cross, like John the Baptist in the famous painting by Gruenwald – ever pointing us back to the cross....

We ask God about suffering...God shows us the cross  
We ask God about death...God shows us the cross  
We ask God about pain...God shows us the cross  
We ask God about injustice...God shows us the cross

We ask God about right and wrong, and should and ought...and yes, God shows us the cross. Over and over again God is saying “remember me” and God is pointing us to the cross.

On Good Friday the cross of Jesus’ death is a reminder that its God up there on that cross, and by virtue of Jesus, us, all of humankind, too. We get a reminder that we are upon that cross while we are at the foot of that cross. We get a reminder that while we want to pass go and collect our 200 dollars, while we want to stop at the rest stop as quickly as possible and resume our 75 mile per hour journey to Easter morning and the resurrection sun; we get a reminder that with no cross there is no empty tomb; no Friday, no Sunday; no death, no resurrection.

“Jesus Remember me,” yes Jesus do. Remember us from Friday to Sunday – remember.

Canadian theologian Douglas John Hall has written, “The cross is our Christian reality-check, and unlike a lot of other religious symbols the cross doesn’t lie about reality.”<sup>1</sup>

The cross tells us that we are truly sinful. That God is really life giving and self-sacrificing. It tells us that all is not as it should be in the world. It makes us evaluate all that we value, and consider the value of all we have thought worthless. How worthless, how boring, must it have seen to the Roman executioners that day – another day, another prophet, another Jew to the gallows sent.

“Jesus remember me,” he said. And in saying it, the robber closest to Jesus teaches us the prayer we are to pray at the foot of the cross.

I have tried – 15 years now of study, of prayer, of meditation, of preaching – I have tried to intellectually grasp this moment. To get to the core of Jesus’ being up there on the cross – to get beyond the words that seem to make sense. I have tried to think my way to the hill of sacrifice. I have tried. But it cannot be done.

John Dunne, master poet and Englishman of letters and lore once wrote, “Last night in the wee hours a thought came to me: to trust God beyond my own understanding of God.”<sup>2</sup> There is no equation that makes good sense of Friday. God dwells beyond our simple understanding of this moment – this dark Friday. This darkest day.

All there is to say when you stand here – before the death of God and the darkness of Friday is “Jesus remember me,” Jesus! Remember us! Take our sins away, relieve our suffering and remember us! We cannot think our way out, we cannot not reason our way out, we cannot explain our way out of needing grace. We need the grace of this cross and we need to pray – Jesus remember me!

Jesus once and for tears down all chances for cheap grace, easy love, or cost-free atonement. It doesn’t work that way, no matter how hard our understandings and our

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<sup>1</sup> *Journal for Preachers*. “Preaching the Cross in our Context.” Easter 2005, page 12.

<sup>2</sup> *Christianity Today*, page 92. April 2005. from *A Journey with God in Time*.

desires for easy reconciliation with God want to demand that it does. There is no easy love on Good Friday. No cheap grace on the cross.

“God’s decision,” the theologian writes, “[is] informed by an all-but-unbelievable love. To be ‘with’ the beloved, the pathetic, or maybe even tragic creature, the loving Creator must become the suffering Redeemer.”<sup>3</sup>

Jesus was who he said he was. Jesus remembered then. He remembers now. It is our calling, our lot, to remember this Lord who remembers us. We hold this service to bear witness that none should ever forget.

There are no words. No words. No simple explanation of this moment of grace. Only God, only Jesus, only Spirit, and only memory.

St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles” (1 Cor. 1:23) which is just another way of saying, “we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to the religious and to the intellectuals.”<sup>4</sup>

Esse Quam Videri – it is better to be with Jesus at the cross than to decide it is unseemly. It is right to pay witness. It is right to bow down. Don’t ignore this day. It is right to cry the tears of pain, pain of a world turned its back on God. It is right to see the height of grace in the depths of despair.

But right there, in the depth of that moment we discover it – perhaps the wisest thing to do – get as close to that robber as we can because he was as close to Jesus as could be and pray with him– “Jesus remember me, Jesus remember us when you come into your kingdom.”

For it is a reminder that the death was not in vain and that the grace of God is not wasted upon the faithful.

Thanks be to God for this harsh day, these tough words, for the courage of Jesus. Thanks be to God indeed.

Amen.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid. 13.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. 9.