

Gospel Luke 1:68-79

⁶⁸"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has looked favorably on his people and redeemed them. ⁶⁹He has raised up a mighty savior for us in the house of his servant David, ⁷⁰as he spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, ⁷¹that we would be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us. ⁷²Thus he has shown the mercy promised to our ancestors, and has remembered his holy covenant, ⁷³the oath that he swore to our ancestor Abraham, to grant us ⁷⁴that we, being rescued from the hands of our enemies, might serve him without fear, ⁷⁵in holiness and righteousness before him all our days. ⁷⁶And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, ⁷⁷to give knowledge of salvation to his people by the forgiveness of their sins. ⁷⁸By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, ⁷⁹to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."

Gospel Luke 23:33-43

³³When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. ³⁴Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." And they cast lots to divide his clothing. ³⁵And the people stood by, watching; but the leaders scoffed at him, saying, "He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!" ³⁶The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine, ³⁷and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!" ³⁸There was also an inscription over him, "This is the King of the Jews."

³⁹One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, "Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!" ⁴⁰But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? ⁴¹And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong." ⁴²Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." ⁴³He replied, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

Remembering Him November 20, 2016

When my father died back in 1995 I ended up with a reel to reel tape recorder along with several reels of tape which were filled with my dad's songs and radio shows. I also have all his records that he made and usually about this time of year as we get close to Christmas, I start to miss him. You know how that feels about your own family I'm sure. And so, I pull out his Christmas album and hear his voice once more. I let his voice and the emotion pour over me as we sing together once again. It can make me sad, in a good way, but it also gives me great encouragement as I remember him. I remember things he told me and things we shared together. I remember the last time we sang together which was also at Christmas time. I wonder what his life with God is like now. It gives me deep hope and assurance for living, even though it is bittersweet at times.

Today as we come to the end of the liturgical year we also come to the end of Jesus' earthly life. Just as we are poised to begin a new year in Advent, a time of new life, we come face to face with Jesus' death, a sobering and memorable moment. And even in death, Jesus has a few last words, a reminder of God's love, even in the face of difficulties.

Prior to the selected reading for today, we know that Jesus has been tried by the High Priest, questioned by Pilot, condemned to death, stripped, beaten, spat upon, and mocked. His closest friends have fled into the night and only the women it seems, walk with him to the cross. As he hangs upon that tree he is jeered by those

watching, "Save yourself! If you are the King of the Jews! If you are the chosen one!" Words we heard in the desert when Jesus was tempted by Satan. Even one of those criminals being executed with him challenged him to save himself and them too. "You are the Messiah, aren't you?"

Thankfully we hear the voice of the other criminal who reminds us that Jesus is blameless, but they are getting what they deserve. He goes on to ask Jesus to remember him when he comes into his Kingdom. And Jesus responds with those beautiful words of promise, "This day you will be with me in paradise." Jesus asks God to forgive all those who have done this to him because he believed they didn't know what they were doing, and then shortly after he dies. He dies in the hope of resurrection which will come later.

Reading this story at the end of our liturgical year is like pulling out old recordings or letters from loved ones long gone, to remind us of who they were and what they meant to us. To read again, words of love and care.

And these last words of Jesus remind us, at least they do for me, remind us, that he was about forgiveness, even to those who crucified him. but even more than that, Jesus came to set us free. Free from the things that separate us from God, whatever that may be. To bring sight, and release, and connection to God and one another. Or as Zachariah reminds us, "To give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace." And in his final moments Jesus reminds us of the hope we have of life beyond death, both physically and metaphorically; both in this world and the next.

Forgiveness and Hope! The hallmarks of a King! King Jesus. King of the Jews-King of the Gentiles-King of our lives. Whose song of love continues to sing through the ages every time we read his story or experience his love in the most unexpected ways. A song we should strive to be singing with every breath we take and every part of our living and loving, a last word for all to hear. Makes me wonder what my last words will be.

As we turn our hearts toward the season of Advent next week I want to leave you with another story about life and death, about forgiveness and hope, about last words and lasting memories, a story of holding one another in eternal love.

It was on the morning news this past Thursday on CBS. It is from their program called, "A More Perfect Union." You may have seen it. it was about Jared and Sharry Buhanan-Decker. They lived in St. George, Utah.

Jared said, "From the moment I met her, I thought she was the most beautiful person I'd ever seen. She was just so full of life and enthusiasm. She was passionate about so many things especially music which was a big part of her life. Sharry loved to sing and she would record songs and then put them on her computer. Once in a while she would upload one to YouTube. She was pretty shy about singing in public.

When Sharry got pregnant last year, she had a captive audience for her songs. She was always rubbing her belly and talking to him and telling him how much she loved him and sang to him as well, so he would know her voice.

In June Sharry went into labor. Jared said, "We were just cuddling together in the hospital bed, kind of waiting for the contractions to really go into labor," "And that's when things kind of plummeted."

Suddenly, people were rushing into the room. "I was obviously very, very afraid and scared, but I was afraid for our baby. It didn't even enter our minds that Sharry would be in danger because that kind of stuff doesn't happen anymore, you know? They told me it's not looking good. We'll need some kind of miracle."

Sharry had a rare complication in which amniotic fluid enters the mother's bloodstream, triggering life-threatening heart and lung reactions. Their baby boy, JJ, survived. Sharry did not. She was 29 years old.

In the interview Jared shared that, “I’m grateful that JJ made it out of there and survived. And in fact, Sharry always kept a bucket list... one was to save a life, and the other was to become an angel. And she saved JJ’s life, and I hope became an angel that day.”

Now a single dad with a newborn, Jared went to Sharry’s computer where he found seven or eight songs that were in a format that he had no idea even what to do with.” The songs were locked away in files he couldn’t open. So, he asked for help on the social news site Reddit where hundreds of Reddit users responded to help unlock the files so little JJ would be able to hear his mother’s voice again. It was a testament to the many people in the world who care about easing the pain and suffering of others.

Jared is so deeply grateful and sure that Sharry would be grateful too for helping them feel more connected as a family. One of Jared’s favorite songs is called, ‘Baby Don’t Worry’— “that’s the one I listen to the most that Sharry wrote that people have helped with. It’s like a lullaby to me and JJ.

Baby don’t you worry about a thing (starts off a little like, ‘This Little Light of Mine’)

It ain’t no use

So baby don’t you worry about a thing

Let everything loose

Cuz I’ve tried and tried

To let go of this noose

So stop trying to (worry about a thing)

Baby don’t you worry about me

I’ll find my way

Baby don’t you worry about me

I’ve just gotta say

I’ve been up and down

And I’m, I’m OK

So stop, stop worrying about me

You can hear Sharry at: <http://www.lovesharred.com/2016/07/baby-dont-worry.html>

On this day where we remember Christ the King, Jesus speaks to us from the most horrendous moment of his life with words of forgiveness and hope. That no matter the circumstances love will prevail and hope is the eternal gift of the Spirit. These are the words of The King of Love, and I can well imagine that he would say the same thing that his angel Sharry said, “Babies don’t you worry about me, I’ll find my way. Babies don’t you worry about me, I’ve just gotta say, I’ve been up and down and I’m Ok, and you will be as well, so stop, stop worrying about a thing. “Look for me in all the oddest and difficult places of your lives and remember me just as I remember you. All will be well, and I’ll see you soon.” Let us pray.

Jesus, you were not the kind of king we were looking for. We hate to admit that but it's true. We were hoping for someone who would have a little more power and influence, who could command armies and force people to do it his way, who could kick some... **'you know what'**, when needed. But you can only offer us forgiveness and peace. What possible good can that be in this world of conflict and disharmony? What good is it to lay down your life for others if they don't appreciate it or live a life of service is no one notices? What good does it do to stand against hatred with only love? We are accustomed to other kings, kings of this world and kings of commerce. We don't know what to do with a King of Love.

Tear open the curtain of our hardened hearts and help us to follow you in this way of peace and love, of service and faithfulness, of compassion even in the face of death. And remember us loving Savior, as you help us, and abide with us, as we work toward Your Kingdom here on earth. For pray in your holy name, Amen.