

**All Saints Steenrijk Episcopal Church**

**Willemstad, Curacao**

**Christ the King Sunday:**

**November 20, 2022**

**A Sermon by the Rev. Joseph Parrish**

**DRAFT**

**“Life, Death, and In Between”**

**The Holy Gospel: Luke 23:33-43**

When 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. Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." And they cast lots to divide his clothing. The people stood by, watching Jesus on the

cross; but the leaders scoffed at him, saying, "He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!" The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine, and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!" There was also an inscription over him, "This is the King of the Jews." One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, "Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!" But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what

we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong." Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." He replied, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

May we always follow the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, Jesus our Savior. Amen.

As I was preparing to begin my sermon, I had just completed a self-assignment of doing what in Medical School are called, "MCQ's", Multiple Choice Questions, We have hundreds of scenarios, some from real experiences, some imagined, and some

downright odd, but the medical writers are preparing us for any eventuality we may encounter as physicians, and believe me, there are many unexpected things in life.

The one particular scenario that struck me was how a physician has confidentiality in life and death matters, far beyond what we may commonly know. But in this ‘fictitious’ MCQ scenario, a woman who had terminal lung cancer and whose treatment opportunities had come to an end asked the Doctor to remove her feeding tube and give her something in her IV so she would be able to die without pain after she had said goodbye to all of her loved ones.

We would-be doctors had to decide whether we could follow her wishes or not. There are some nuances to the actual answer since every country has its own end of life laws, but in the US we are not permitted to add anything in patients IV bag to help them die. But that patient's request is not an uncommon one in modern end-of-life medicine. The correct answer to that Multiple Choice Question was that we can remove a feeding tube at a patient's request if they are mentally competent, but we cannot give any patient anything to hasten their death.

The scenario in today's Gospel is the Crucifixion. In the present day and age, the means of executions are still brutal, in my opinion, and not proven to be pain free, and bungling an execution is not uncommon, to wit, a recent failed third attempt in the State of Alabama. The Roman army in Jesus' time had little compunction or care for those being executed, hence the crucifixion stories in the Gospels who note the Roman executioners regularly broke the legs of any person being executed by crucifixion if they 'hung on' to life too long. Recall that Jesus was spared that fate of broken legs as he had already died before either of the two

prisoners beside him. There was even a prophecy that the Messiah would indeed not suffer any of his bones to be broken.

Today's Gospel writer stands starkly at the foot of Jesus' cross and records the conversation between Jesus and the two thieves who were being crucified along side him.

One criminal taunts Jesus to use his great powers to get all of them down from their hangings. But the other asked Jesus to remember him when Jesus comes into his eternal kingdom, and Jesus grants the man his final wish, assuring him he will be with Jesus in Paradise after his last breath.

As a priest I have had the opportunity to be with more than one person as they actually died. I did not have the power to raise any one of them from the dead as Jesus did for his friend Lazarus.

One of my emergency medicine doctor friends said he was severely criticized by other doctors when he extended his dying mother's death too long in their estimation. It is surely the tendency many would have if they had such medical skills. We sometimes do have the wherewithal to extend lives more that any one could just a few years ago. But death comes eventually. And we all have to face the certainty of our own



demise, although we pretty much deny our end until our own dying breath.

But the step into eternity is a step which we as Christians find more palatable due to such stories as we have in our Gospel reading for today.

Another of my friends in emergency medicine tells the story of seeing a large entourage of cars coming to the hospital emergency entrance with the patriarch of the family in the lead car. As he met the driver, the driver looking at the patriarch told the Doctor, “He don’t look too good.” Actually he, the patriarch was already experiencing a bit of rigor mortis, but my friend anticipated

the great drama that would occur once the patriarch had been declared dead, so he told his emergency room staff to do their standard Code procedure as they would with another person near death and fully treat the patriarch as they would treat an actually dying person. And they did. Finally after all the drugs and electric paddles had been used, the patriarch's death was finally called, a bit after he had actually died, since he was presented already dead upon arrival. So they dignified the patriarch and his family by going thoroughly through all the procedures to save a dying person's life.

In fact the statistics say only about twenty percent actually survive a full code, a complete cardiac arrest and so on. But we strive always to move that percentage a bit higher day by modern medicine day.

But our Christian faith is there to help us cope with the final breath, the final smile, the final sight and sound.

And this story of the dying thief becomes one of the touchstones of our faith. We believe anyone can make the deathbed request to Christ and that request will be granted.

Imagine that is not Peter accepting us into heaven, but it is the Penitent Thief who is the real gate keeper; we don't know.

Christ accepts us as we are, flesh and bones, sinful and unclean. We cannot 'tidy up' at our last breath, we can only fall on the merciful arms of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ and ask to meet him in Paradise. He is the King of Glory. He is the Prince of Peace. He is the Holy One of Heaven. And today we continue to strive to be the best we can be as his followers until our last breath.

Let us bless the Lord. Thanks be to God.  
Amen.

## “Life, Death, and In Between”

Description: Life is short. We are called by God to find in ourselves the sense of godliness. And we are called to share that Spirit of Love and Peace with one another.

Tags: Jesus, Lord, God, Spirit, life, death, healing, dying, thief, cross, Romans, Paradise