

Jeremiah 23:1-6  
Canticle 16  
Colossians 1:11-20  
Luke 23:33-43

Thanksgiving is coming right up and we all know there's a fair amount of work that goes into preparing our home for out of town guests. That happens to lots of us at this time of year and it's almost always a mixed blessing. On the one hand, we are thrilled to have family come to see us and to stay for a few days. On the other hand, we're not sure we have the energy or the organizational skills we need to get everything ready in time and keep things moving smoothly. Making lists in advance is sometimes helpful. Figuring out what you can do well in advance works, too. But that last day before they arrive. That's the day!! I need every minute I can get! And I am *never* ready. Unfortunately, I do not live in a state of perpetual preparedness! My worst nightmare is to get the arrival date and time wrong.

It's the day before they get here and all of a sudden, the phone rings. It's my company. "Hi, We're here. You're where? In your driveway. Come unlock the door and let us in!" I'd go flying down the stairs to the door all the while saying under my breath: you can't be here now. You can't be here today. You're supposed to be here tomorrow, not today. I'm not ready!!! But I let them in anyway with all the grace and good humor I can muster! Ready or not, right day or not, they're here. Apparently, their arrival date is today!!

In the gospel of Luke there is no more consoling or challenging word than TODAY. In the second chapter of Luke the Angel said to the shepherds in the field in Bethlehem, "Do not be afraid. I am bringing good news of great joy for all the people; to you is born TODAY in the City of David a Savior who is the Messiah."

And when Jesus began his ministry and read the passage of Isaiah in his hometown synagogue in Nazareth, he rolled the scroll up when he was finished and said to them, "TODAY this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

And while hanging on the cross, Jesus looked the dying thief in the eye and said to him, "TODAY you will be with me in Paradise." How consoling those words must have been in the midst of agony.

If we're really honest with ourselves, we can all get caught in the same predicament I faced with my Thanksgiving company. Despite the fact that I had made lists...several of them...and had spread the work out over a number of days, I wasn't ready when they arrived. We can all gaze at Jesus and know that there are some things that we need to do to get ready for his arrival, but many times, we don't want to do the spiritual work TODAY. It can't be TODAY, we think. We're not ready. We want more time. We'll get around to that spiritual work some other day, but not TODAY. If Jesus wants his kingdom to be in our lives TODAY then he's going to have to act in our lives TODAY because our lives need to change TODAY. In order for our lives to change TODAY, we are going to have to respond TODAY. Sometimes we tell ourselves that a living relationship with Jesus should actually come at some time in the future...some time when we have more time for that sort of thing. In our minds, it needs to be pushed off until tomorrow where it remains inconsequential in present time. Just like the things we don't know what to do with that we absentmindedly store in the basement for 'later.' Think long and hard about inviting Jesus into your life TODAY because if you do, you'll have to make changes TODAY. The biggest lie that Satan has ever told any of us is: "You have plenty of time to get right with God!"

On the cross, Jesus didn't say 'tomorrow you will be with me.' In the synagogue in Nazareth, Jesus didn't say, 'tomorrow these scriptures will be fulfilled within your hearing.' And on Christmas Day, the angel didn't say, "Tomorrow a savior will be born to you who is the Messiah.'

In the New Testament, so much of Jesus' truth hangs on the word TODAY. He healed people TODAY as they stood in front of him. He fed people TODAY as they gathered on the hillside to listen to him. He taught his words of truth about God's love for them to the people he met TODAY. Nothing was postponed. Nothing was deferred. There is always a sense of urgency with Jesus. And it's the same now as it was then...this sense of urgency...this push to do it NOW...do it TODAY!

Jesus knew that God's promise to Israel for a Messiah was happening TODAY for them and for him. It was happening in real time. If we believe what Jesus says about his desire to be present with us, his willingness to be in our lives, his commitment to us then that means that we can be set free TODAY. We can be set free from our obsessions and our destructive compulsions that try to control us. We can be set free from selfishness that causes us to judge our neighbors. We can be set free by the love of Jesus. We can trust again by the power of Jesus. And we can live again because Jesus is alive in us TODAY.

TODAY can also be a scary word in Luke's gospel. Jesus really means it when he says to us that we can be with him TODAY. Jesus really means it when he says that we can experience his power TODAY. And Jesus really means it when he says that we can live in his kingdom TODAY.

BUT, if that's what we want, we have to be willing to change TODAY. And like all human beings, we aren't too happy about change. We don't necessarily want it to be TODAY. We aren't ready TODAY. There are other things we'd rather be doing TODAY. God hears all that, but God is not hesitant. However, we human beings are hesitant to turn over our lives to Him because, if we do, He will turn our lives around. Sometimes people prefer to not let God in too close, so we make up what we think are honorable excuses...you know; the kinds of excuses we make if we don't want to accept a social invitation. God can probably see right through those.

But Jesus' word TODAY reminds us that we don't have more time to waste or to wait. Chaos surrounds us. All we need to do to find it is to turn on the news or read the paper, so we have to act TODAY.

We have been called by God's son. Jesus has put his every existence on the line for us and he has given us both his spirit and his power. Through Jesus, God has sent us an invitation...an invitation to be part of the kingdom of God. It has been given to us TODAY. In our gospel lesson this morning, Jesus speaks that beautiful word TODAY. It's an invitation meant for us as well as for the thief. With his hands and side and face and feet bleeding and his lungs gasping for air, he says these beautiful words of invitation. And we are reminded that the Kingdom of God does not become concrete without sacrifice. It doesn't come without daily dying and it can't come any other way.

We can experience God's love and power and mercy but that means we have to remove the barriers to his kingdom that are in our souls. We have to remove them with the help of his grace. He will not remove them without our permission nor without our plea. We must, with God's help remove the greed in us; the pride in us; the ego in us. We must remove the love of comfort in us; the laziness in us; the lustfulness in us. With God's help and grace we must remove the anger in us; the envy in us; the impatience in us. We must remove the judgment we make of others; we must give up bad habits and messed up priorities and our own false sense of power. And we must let go of our grudges...all of them...and offer forgiveness instead. We must embrace Jesus' vision of the world...a world of non-violence and economic justice and opportunity.

To do all that, we may have to give up some of the things we were certain of and the things we felt sure were under our control. TODAY we have to let them go. TODAY we have to turn to Christ. TODAY we must be willing to sacrifice so the poor may be fed; the lonely may be comforted; the imprisoned may be visited; the sick may be healed; the naked may be clothed and those burdened by the world's injustice may have freedom.

Wait????? Is that TODAY??????

I'm not ready for you yet Jesus. I thought this was going to arrive at some time in the future. But, no. Check your Biblical text. It's all about Christ becoming king and Lord and lover of your life and my life TODAY. And it's impossible to out-maneuver God.

Put down your coffee and your phone and change for the one who promises you Paradise. TODAY. We all live inside our own heads and our furniture there is our own thoughts, our own feelings, and our own interpretations of what's going on around us. Let Jesus rearrange the furniture for you. He'll bring Paradise with him.

Thanks be to God.

AMEN.

Sermon Outline courtesy of  
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