***Luke 23:39-43 Then one of the criminals who were hanged blasphemed Him, saying, “If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us.” 40But the other, answering, rebuked him, saying, “Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation? 41And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong.” 42Then he said to Jesus, “Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom.” 43And Jesus said to him. “Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.”***

Today is Palm Sunday, the beginning of Holy Week. This week started with Jesus riding in on a donkey, low and humble, coming as sacrificial Lamb. The next time He comes, He will come as conquering King.

This morning, we’re with Jesus, as He is crucified between two thieves. Isaiah 53 foretold this, saying that He would be numbered with the transgressors. The triumphal entry has happened. The Last Supper has been instituted. Feet have been washed. Betrayal has been made. Trial has occurred. Nails have been driven. Here we are. Imagine that we are looking up, three crosses, two thieves, One innocent, a sign – King of the Jews, the crowd reviling and mocking, and Mary, along with others, weeping, as Jesus dies for our sins. Death is creeping, but soon Hope will be dawning! Our Savior will die, only to Rise. We rejoice in that this morning!

Before we look at this scripture, let’s level set. Two criminals, guilty. One innocent, not guilty. We have every reason to believe that nails pierce the thieves hands and feet, just as they pierce Jesus. Have we ever considered that? Jesus is bleeding, so are the thieves. Jesus is having trouble breathing, so are the thieves. Jesus is dying by what history has deemed the most cruel form of death… so are the thieves. Both these thieves are reviling Jesus, until somewhere between the sixth and the ninth hour – noon until three in the afternoon, something changes, and we want to consider that change this morning.

Verse 39 - *Then one of the criminals who were hanged blasphemed Him, saying, “If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us.”* If You are the Christ. Unbelief. Blasphemy. Rejection. Show me a sign Jesus. Fix my problems. Take me off this cross. End my suffering so I might go back to my sin. The Hebrew has the idea that this thief moved from reviling Jesus, as the crowd is doing, to seething with hate and rejecting Him. Yet, we mustn’t shake our head and cluck our tongue at this transgressor, because we too are transgressors. In fact, many of us have spent hours praying a similar prayer – Jesus, if You love me, take my suffering from me, give me a life of comfort, ease, peace. Take this cross that you have called me to take up. Save me from the sufferings of this world, though these sufferings may be our very avenue to deeper relationship.

Verses 40-41 *But the other, answering, rebuked him, saying, “Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation? 41And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong.”*Before the 6th hour, both were reviling Jesus. Now, between the 6th and 9th hour, hearts changed. Both thieves are dying. Both will face God. Both will end up in one of two places. The first rejects Jesus. The second rebukes the first. We have sinned and deserve this. Jesus doesn’t. Likewise, all of us sitting here this morning have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Death is the wage we’ve earned. Romans 6:23 - *For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.* Eternal death is the just reward for our deeds; yet God provides a gift… but, like any gift, we must accept it.

Verse 42 *Then he said to Jesus, Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom.* The first thief – If You are the Christ… Are You not the Christ! The second thief, having grasped the Truth, prays – Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom. One thief rejected Jesus. The other accepted Jesus, humbly praying that, come what may, no matter what the future holds, take me to my eternal Home with You. I believe You. You are the Way, Truth, and Life.

Isn’t that the true prayer we are all praying when we accept Jesus as Lord and Savior? Jesus, this cross is painful, my sufferings are unpleasant. But Jesus, my suffering pales in comparison to what You endured that I might be saved from an eternal death. No matter what the days and weeks ahead hold, no matter the earthly sufferings I endure, remember me when my time comes please Dear Savior. We’re all transgressors. Our prayers are focused on one place or the other. Either, Jesus end my worldly suffering, come down off the cross and serve me, make my life easy, my bank account full, and all my days sunshine and unicorns… that is, if You are really who You claim to be…. Or, Jesus, I am Yours. Come what may, come what sufferings are ahead, come what persecutions, trials, tribulations, hatred, I do not ask for relief from this cross. I ask for remembrance in Your Kingdom. Have we asked for Remembrance in Christ’s Kingdom?

This week, as we enter Holy Week and think about what Christ endured on our behalf, let that be our prayer. Jesus, I serve You. I ask not relief from my earthly cross, but remembrance in Your Eternal Kingdom. Let’s all seek to hear the wonderful words Jesus said to the second transgressor - *And Jesus said to him. “Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.”*