

'Make known to those yet unborn the saving deeds that God has done'

I know, I know, it's not Good Friday, it's Sunday morning late in November, just before Thanksgiving in New England. So why do we have to hear about the crucifixion of Jesus Christ as our Gospel reading? Why can't we be talking about the blessings of the bountiful earth, the fragrance of hot turkey and pies cooking in the kitchen? Why can't we focus on the blessings of life and generosity and interdependence exemplified on that first Thanksgiving morning, and then just wrap up this morning message with a quick, "and let us pray that more and more the world in our time will move forward with such spirit" - and just say Amen? –

Why the reading on the Crucified Lord today? Especially when St. Matt's is celebrating the baptism of beautiful baby? Why the buzzkill?

Well, there are a few good reasons. First off, it's not Thanksgiving yet. Thanksgiving is Thursday. St. Matt's always offers a nice, simple Holy Communion service on Thanksgiving Day at 10am, with Thanksgiving readings and prayers, and , yes, a short reverent Thanksgiving message from yours truly.

Second, next Sunday December 1 is the first Sunday of Advent, the start of a brand new church year that looks forward to the coming of Christ. Given that, you realize that this day, this Sunday is the very last Sunday of the Christian year and, therefore, it is important to say something about what the last day means for people of faith in Christ. Will it be a day of defeat or of victory for God?

Thirdly, in a very rare move, our Bishop Rob Hirschfeld has asked all clergy to speak about the evils of state sponsored execution, which The Episcopal Church has condemned officially and often for many many years, and there is no more fitting example of the horrors of state sponsored execution in all the world than the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

I mean, in the US alone since 1973 over 130 people convicted of murder facing the death sentence have, thank God, had their convictions overturned because they were wrongfully convicted. And in the last 40 years at least 8 souls have been executed though strong evidence of their innocence was later discovered. Too little, too late. A shame and a sin. And if that were not enough to convince

one that state sponsored execution is immoral, imprecise in application, and, by the way, totally against what our Lord taught when citing the commandment **'Thou shalt not kill, and never return evil for evil, and turn the other cheek'**, we know in our nation that a disproportionate number of non-white and poor people get the death penalty for the same or lesser charges than their white counterparts. Speaking of money and the death penalty, did you know that on average it costs 30 million dollars to execute one person, ten times more than it costs to imprison someone in the highest security prison in the land for 100 years? Here in New Hampshire where far right conservatives say they are so protective of our tax dollars that they cut aid to the poor and sick and education for our kids, well they show they are not conservative but radically morally even more deficient by their willingness to embrace finding over 4 million dollars for a death chamber in our fair state because **we don't have one – and since the 1800's NH has said we don't want one.** And I tell you that our crucified Lord would stand here and tell you today **we don't need one.**

OK, rant over, for now. But the reason for this particular emphasis this Sunday, the last day, as we, to quote the great John Donne, 'Hang with the man who hung on the cross', as we worship in the name of the Healer of Nations and Lover of Souls, you need to understand that finally there will be a house bill forthcoming in the New Hampshire legislature calling for the abolition of the death penalty once and for all. And it has a chance to pass if you choose to help. The bill is being drafted by a state representative whose own father was murdered. And this good soul does not want another person, not even a guilty one, to die by premeditated killing like his father did, especially not at the hands of his state. Not in his name.

Not with his tax dollars and ours supporting such an act.

No really, end of rant. Want more? See me later or join the Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty in NH or join with the Episcopal Peace Fellowship to take this on here and nationwide.

For on the last day, in the end, we need to account for ourselves as civilized people yes, but more importantly, as faithful people- as Jesus' people. And in just a minute we will stand with a brand new beautiful baby and we will promise in

the presence of her parents and grandparents and before God, that we will do all in our power to help her grow into the stature of Christ, that we will respect the dignity of every human being, that we will seek and serve Christ in all persons – yes the innocent and yes even those in prison – yes even the guilty – **THAT WE WILL PROCLAIM BY WORD AND EXAMPLE THE GOOD NEWS OF GOD IN CHRIST.**

This child about to be baptized, and all God's children need to know that at the end of the day – on the last day- in the end- that the victory of Christ is all about the ongoing faith process that leads to persons restored and a world redeemed, made whole once more, in the fullness of time. Our children and grandchildren need to know that somebody in the world affirms this, and that somebody is you and me. May our song be that of the thief who Jesus welcomed to God's Kingdom at the eleventh hour, the man who said, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom.' May our children come to know of God's limitless love too, that it includes all of them, throughout their lives.

So yes, I know, it's not Good Friday. In fact this last Sunday of the Christian year is called Christ the King Day – as in the victory of light over darkness – the victory of God's life and love over our propensities for retribution and death.

That's right, in the end we owe it to our kids to extend, and never presume to limit, the saving love of Christ. Pray that by our witness the crucifixions will cease and healing will come, even on the last day. Amen