

Easter Sunday

On Good Friday, driving to Church, my radio suddenly jumped to the Evangelical station.

I like listening to those preachers sometimes.

They say it so well, even if what they say is sometimes bizarre.

This particular preacher was going on about "justice."

About keeping our streets safe and punishing criminals.

About softheaded judges who let criminals go free.

Softheaded judges who know nothing of God's justice.

Slaps on the wrist, he said, offend God, he said.

Withholding punishment from the guilty offends God, he said.

That he said these things on Good Friday, with Easter just around the corner, --- well, it got me thinking---what *about* God's justice?

In truth, God's justice is terribly softheaded.

God's justice is a travesty.

God's justice makes a mockery of our justice.

In God's justice, an innocent dies for the guilty.

In God's justice, the worst kind of pre-meditated murder is met, not with vengeance, but with forgiveness.

In God's justice, the men who deserted him are welcomed back, the men who slay him are absolved.

That is what we gather here this morning to remember.

The itch that so many need to scratch is the belief that life is a deal. You do this, and I'll do that. You and I will scratch each other's back.

In the Latin it's: quid pro quo. This for that.

And you know what, that life makes sense.

That life seems fair. That life I can walk around in.

Even the Church loves that life.

And in that life, the Church, sometimes with the very best of intentions, transforms the light of Christ from the sun that shines freely, and for free, on everyone, into a kind of electric company Jesus, where we must pay the bill each month (by doing good deeds, by giving stuff up, by walking on the right side of the road, by believing exactly the right way).

And if we don't pay the bill, the juice is cut off, and there we are, sitting in the dark.

That's the kind of God that the radio preacher had in mind the other morning.

A tit for tat God.

And if you think about it, I'll bet lots of us here prefer that kind of God.

Because with that God, I have a say.

With that God, I have some control.

I do "A" for God and God will do "B" for me.

Cool.

We human beings, it seems, love to be in control.

So give me the God who rewards the just and punishes the sinner.

Give me the God who puts bad guys in jail so good guys can walk the streets safely at night. That's the Jesus I want!

But the mystery of Jesus Christ is not that.

It is this: that the light of the world really does shine on you and on me, and it shines on the Dalai Lama and it shines on Osama bin Ladin. It shines on Kim Jung Il and it shines on the Archbishop of Canterbury. It shines on the drunk asleep at the bus stop, and it shines on Donald Trump.

It shines on us all.

For no charge.

For free.

For nothing.

All because this bizarre, upside down God who does anything and everything to have us, wants it to be so.

And there is great wisdom in this.

How much mischief do we create when we divide the world into the good guys and the bad?

How much mischief do we create when we decide how God should judge *them folks* over there?

We don't have far to look.

A minister in Florida burns the Holy Koran, and hundreds are injured or killed half a world away.

Human judgment and human vengeance are poor substitutes for the will of God.

We pray each Sunday for the holy catholic church.

"Catholic" meaning universal.

The church is not catholic because *everyone belongs* to it. They don't now and probably never will.

The church is catholic because it is a sign to the world that God, in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, has reconciled himself to every last one of us.

From Adam to Zachary and everyone in between, from every where and every when, for good, for ever.

As one priest puts it: "This means that the mystery of Christ is present not just in Christians or in good guys, but present in sinners right in the midst of their sins.

It means that the mystery isn't something that picks up its lily-white skirts and runs away when someone does a no-no. The mystery is everywhere." Capon, *The Mystery of Christ*, 65-66.

Don't take my word for it. Just look at Jesus.

Jesus hangs out with prostitutes and tax sharks. He eats, drinks and laughs with the worst sorts of people, the losers, the cheats, even the traitors.

He embraces them just as he embraces us, just as we are: with all of our gifts, with all of our rottenness.

By raising Jesus from the dead, God announces the great "YES" to all that Jesus said and did; and to all that Jesus refused to do too.

What God does in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus is to marry us, for better or for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health.

All because this softheaded judge, who lets the guilty off the hook, will stop at nothing to have us.

As the women approach the tomb, they expect to anoint a corpse.

What they encounter is an earthquake and a cheeky angel who rolls away a stone and plops himself down on top of it.

As the women run, in their terror and in their joy, they run headlong into the risen Lord himself.

No one expects this.

No one foresees this.

And quite frankly, at first, no one really wants it.

A dead Messiah is understandable. Israel was littered with them.

Life always ends in death; we all know that. That conviction is what fuels our need to fix things, to run things, to control things.

Except, with God, everything is turned inside out.

The same God who invades Mary's womb at Christmas today invades the tomb where Jesus lay.

Everyone knows that virgins don't conceive and the dead stay dead. But with God, the child is born, and Jesus is raised.

Where there is no way, God makes a way.

Just when it seems for all the world that revenge rules, forgiveness is given.

Just when it seems the world is all about death, God raises the dead to life.

Just when you think you have the meaning of life all figured out, Jesus stands before you saying, "don't be afraid."

What all of this means to me is that our salvation is not in our own hands.

It's out of our control.

God does it for us.

All we need to do is let the scales fall from our eyes and see what has been there all along.

It is God whose arms are outstretched.

It is God who is welcoming us home.

All we need do is say Thank you.

All we need do is accept that despite all the evidence to the contrary, we are accepted. We are accepted. We are accepted.

This is the miracle of resurrection!

This is the miracle of our salvation!

Thanks be to God!

+amen.