

A Letter from Prison

April 1, 2007

(Palm Sunday - Year C)

Luke 22:39 - 23:49

St. Alban's Episcopal Church, Waco, Texas

We just heard and experienced the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Luke.

Luke's Gospel is the only 1 of the 4 Gospels that records the discussion between Jesus and the 2 criminals who were crucified on each side of Jesus.

In the Gospel of Luke, one of the criminals who was crucified with Jesus derides him and says:

“Are you not the Messiah?
Save yourself and us!”

But, then the other criminal rebukes the first criminal and says:

“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 [Jesus] has done nothing wrong.”

This criminal then turns to Jesus and says:

“Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”

In other words, this criminal wants to know:

“Jesus, will you let me into your kingdom?”

And, Jesus replies, with compassion:

“Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.”

Sometimes, I tend to forget that this short, little conversation is a discussion among 3 convicted criminals who are on death row.

I tend to forget sometimes that Jesus was executed by capital punishment.

Jesus was a convicted criminal.

Jesus was an incarcerated prisoner.

Last Thursday, I was thumbing through my mail that was in my inbox. I am not talking about email in my inbox, but about snail mail that I received through the US Postal Service. I thumbed through the usual junk mail and religious catalogs that I get. Then, my eye was drawn to a very unusual letter.

The handwritten letter was addressed to:
The Rev. Jeff W. Fisher, Rector, St. Alban's Episcopal Church.
And, the return address on the letter said:
Homer Dale Davis
Estelle Unit
Huntsville, Texas.

The letter was from a prisoner in Huntsville.
With curiosity, I opened this letter and this is what it said:

*Dear Rev. Fisher,
I hope you are well and in good spirit.
My name is Dale or "Slim."
I am 49 years old and I am a white male.
I am 6' 3" and 175 lbs.
I am incarcerated for a felony DWI.
By career, I am a land surveyor.
I am also an Episcopalian.
I attend church quite regularly - mainly Catholic Mass when it is available.*

*I was cited for my crime on September 29, 2003.
I was out on bond until June 24, 2004, in which I have been incarcerated ever since.
I have a projected release date of June 22, 2007.
I resided in a very nice ranch house on the west side of town at the time of my arrest, which was in East Waco.
I [later] resided in a three bedroom mobile home on the very east side of Waco...when I went to court.*

I am basically writing you to tell you I am looking for an Episcopal

Church home.

*I intend on being active in church programs and to be of service to God
through the church.*

Faith, Hope and Love -

May God Bless You -

Slim Davis

P.S. I pray that I may choose and decide to cross the bridge of faith.

*I pray that by crossing this bridge I may receive the spiritual power I
need.*

Please write to me and let me know more about St. Alban's.

*I will be of service in any way that would be helpful to you and St.
Alban's.*

Once again - God Bless You - Slim.

I must admit to you that my first reaction to this letter from Slim Davis,
this prisoner in Huntsville, was to think it is a scam.

But, then I began to realize that Slim Davis is a prisoner, a convict.

And, Jesus, my Lord and Savior, was also a prisoner, a convict.

And, on top of that, Jesus' last companions on this earth were 2
prisoners, 2 convicted criminals.

And, one of those criminals asks Jesus from his cross:

"Jesus, will you let me into your kingdom?"

And, Jesus replies, with compassion:

"Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

From his prison cell, Slim Davis has written a letter to me, as the rector
of St. Alban's Episcopal Church, asking me, in essence:

"St. Alban's, will you let me into your kingdom?"

I have not yet decided exactly how I will respond to Slim.

But, I do know that I will write him back.

And, I believe that my response to Slim should be the same as that of
our crucified Lord.

I believe that my response should be:

“Slim, truly I tell you, today you will be with us in Paradise.”

Because, each of us are criminals, hanging on a cross beside Jesus.
Each of us have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.
Each of us have sinned against God and each other, in thought, word and
deed, by what we have done and what we have left undone.
Each of us are convicted criminals.

And, in our desperation, we write a handwritten letter from the prison
cell of our sins.

We turn our heads to Jesus on his cross and ask:

“Jesus, will you let me into your kingdom?”

And, Jesus replies to me, Jesus replies to you:

“Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.”

AMEN.

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