

Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise

Luke 23:43

Bible Verse(s):

Luke 23:43 - He replied, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

Reflection:

It's a morbid thought, but imagine one day as you lie dying, what are the last words you might wish to hear. I'd probably want to hear my family tell me they love me and are proud of me. I might want to hear a grown-up eldest son crack some witty joke the way we always enjoyed, or perhaps hear about the latest news from a grandchild who loves me but doesn't understand death really.

On the cross, one of the last meaningful and kind things that one of the criminals crucified with Jesus heard was this: 'Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.'

I wonder how this criminal felt at hearing this short sentence through his agony, through his thirst, through his desperation. A sentence itself spoken through gritted teeth from one man dying in agony to another. A sentence, that on any other lips would be laughable.

And yet, its recipient didn't laugh, didn't mock, didn't ignore. These words of truth promised immediate salvation. Rescue was never asked for and wasn't offered. Instead, God's mercy and a safe journey home at the end was assured. There wasn't time for some 'pie-in-the-sky' possibility of a future. Instead, it was a promise, from one dying man to another, and it was a promise for today.

A promise? What kind of promise could a man make in the midst of crucifixion? I imagine that many promises were made there. Promises to and from relatives. Desperate promises to any god who might listen ahead of a final reckoning. But promises of favour from one dying man to another seem unlikely. Who could keep such a promise? Who would make promises that were impossible to live up to?

And yet, there was this promise given and received, from one dying man to another. Promised through pain and received in certainty of death and yet in faith that this promise, however unlikely in human terms, would be fulfilled. And so through the pain, the suffocation, the mocking and the blood, hope was given and received. And a life was transformed, even at the point of death.

One day, in different circumstances I hope, perhaps I will hear those words. Words from one dying man to another. Words of hope, words of transformation and words of truth

even at the point of death. Words which would seem empty and laughable if it wasn't for the man who uttered them. Words, from Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, beckoning me on and calling me home. Home to a paradise prepared in advance where God lives with his people; with all who hear those words: 'today you will be with me in paradise.'