

Jesus on the Cross

DARRELL DELANEY

A man with a criminal record nailed to a cross whispers one request and receives a promise of paradise. A grieving mother hears her dying son give her a new son on the spot. At Golgotha, judgment and mercy stand side by side, and a new kind of family begins under a darkened sky. That is where we are going as we visit the stations eleven and twelve today on *Groundwork*.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Welcome to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DARRELL DELANEY

I am Darrell Delaney; and Scott, we are in our series on the Stations of the Cross, where we have been walking through them. This is episode six of our seven-part series; and we watched Jesus wrestle in Gethsemane; we saw him get betrayed and arrested; we listened as counsels and courts handed down crooked verdicts; we followed him as Roman power moved the story toward execution; and today, we reach a scene where two criminals hang next to Jesus: one of them reaches for mercy as the last hours tick away.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And since we are approaching the conclusion of Lent through this program and the next one, just remember why we are doing this. I mean, we take the Lenten journey one way or the other every year in the Church. We take those forty days from Ash Wednesday through to, you know, Holy Saturday, and we follow Jesus to the cross, essentially. We ponder what he did; we ponder our own mortality and our own sinfulness—two of the things that Jesus' death and resurrection will take care of. We will get eternal life and we will be forgiven. So, Lent reminds us of mortality and of sin; of our need to throw ourselves completely on Jesus. This year, in this *Groundwork* series, we are doing the Stations of the Cross. They have been a traditional guide through Lent for many years. They often, as we said in the first program, associate with the Roman Catholic Church, but they really are for anybody, and the most revised list of the Stations of the Cross are all deeply biblical, so those are the fourteen that we have been looking at.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; and we have reached station eleven today, and Jesus is on the cross. So, we can take a look at that from Luke 23. It says...picking up at verse 39...it says: One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him (him being Jesus): "Aren't you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!" ⁴⁰But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence?" ⁴¹We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong." ⁴²Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." ⁴³Jesus answered him, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise."

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, two thieves on either side of Jesus...again, as we said in the previous program, a reminder of how routine crucifixion was in the Roman Empire. This happened all the time. Today, Jesus wasn't even the only one. So, one of these criminals hurls insults and mocks Jesus; joins those who on the ground were mocking Jesus. He wants a rescue, but maybe on his terms: Save yourself and us. There is no surrender there, only demand. But the other criminal, Darrell, seems to wake up to reality. I mean, he admits his guilt, basically. He names Jesus

as innocent, and then he prays one of the shortest, clearest prayers in the Bible: Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; so, Scott, that moment right there exposes the whole gospel in just a few lines. He is not trying to bargain with Jesus; he is not trying to make up for lost time or make any promises; he is completely honest about the sin in his life. He trusts Jesus as his king and makes a plea to Jesus to be remembered. And I love the fact that Jesus answers him tenderly, just square: Today you will be with me in paradise. The one who looks like he is finished and looks like he has no authority...he still holds authority over death, and he still spends that authority on a man who has nothing to offer him back.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It is interesting to notice that this thief on the cross actually uses one of the most familiar words from Jesus' preaching and teaching: *kingdom*. We don't have to think about this because we are so used to reading this, but how did this criminal, dying on his own cross, know to use that particular word? I mean, is it possible he had heard Jesus preach once? Had he heard about the message that Jesus taught? I mean, we cannot know for sure, but it is striking that he hit on the thing that Jesus had been talking about from his very first sermon onward. Jesus began by saying: The kingdom of God is at hand; and here, this thief uses that exact word. That is interesting. But equally interesting, Darrell, is that when Jesus replies, he *doesn't* use the word *kingdom*; instead, he uses the word *paradise*.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; and that word *paradise* is interesting because he doesn't use it very often. It only comes up three times in the whole Bible...that word *paradise*. I mean, here in Luke right now we see the word *paradise*; and then, in 2 Corinthians 12, Paul is relating to some spiritual vision he had where he says he was caught up into paradise or the third heaven, whatever that means. The other time was in Revelation 2, where Jesus tells John, when he is exiled at the Isle of Patmos, that those will be victorious; they will be able to eat from the Tree of Life that is in the paradise of God [reference verse 7]. So, why Jesus uses this word is really interesting.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; he hadn't used it at any time. It was always kingdom, kingdom, kingdom, and here the thief uses it and he replies with paradise. But, one other quick thing to note: Some commentators and translators have tried, Darrell, to suggest a different way to hear what Jesus is saying: Someone has to read Jesus saying: I tell you today, you will be with me in paradise. So, in other words, Jesus is not saying that on that same day the thief would be in paradise, but that on that day, Jesus was promising that someday he would be in paradise. I don't know; in the long run, it is a distinction without a difference. He is going to be in paradise one way or the other; but I actually think...and I think most commentators think that the way we have always understood it, *today*...this very day...you will be with me in paradise. That is probably the right way.

Darrell Delaney:

Yes; and back to that promise of salvation to this thief, that promise is not just for him, it is for all people who...some people can believe maybe it is too late for me; I wasted a lot of my life; I had too many failures; I have done too much damage to folks; but this station of the cross confronts that lie, because at this cross, there is a man who literally has no future; he has no chance to repair what he has done; he hears a royal welcome from Jesus and that shows the grace of God reaches to every age of your life; and it doesn't matter when you turn to Christ, but when you do, you will not be rejected or ignored.

SCOTT HOEZEE

I mean, you know, as pastors, and some of us in other parts of life, we have met people on hospital beds...death beds; we have met people in jail cells or in recovery circles. We have been in those places, and yes, you hear people say: I wasted years; I hurt people; I don't know how to fix this; but when that confession meets the crucified king, their story is not over; there is a new beginning with Jesus. You know, in prison ministry that we have both been involved with, Darrell, you know, we often say: Don't let the worst

five minutes of your life determine the rest of your life. With Jesus, there is always a new chance for new life.

DARRELL DELANEY

And the beautiful thing is, I mean, a lot of listeners know that Jesus forgives sinners in general, but the question is: Will he receive *me*? And this scene actually answers that in a personal way. Jesus speaks to the thief directly, after this thief speaks to him directly. So, there is definitely comfort and invitation. So, when we think about this station in Lent, we can bring to mind maybe one failure that we tend to ignore or shove in the corner or minimize and name it before the Lord in plain language and ask Jesus to remember me; and we could do that and that statement of trust will be a beautiful thing to remember that the cross still holds his kingdom and still receives promises and receives those who reach for him at any time.

Well, in the next segment, we want to talk about Jesus speaking from that same cross to his mother and the beloved disciple. So, stay tuned.

Segment 2

SCOTT HOEZEE

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DARRELL DELANEY

And I am Darrell Delaney; and Scott, station twelve takes us to another brief holy exchange, not too different than the brief exchange of station eleven. So, while the soldiers are gambling and leaders are mocking, Jesus looks down and sees two faces in the crowd who walked with him for years; and we can pick this up in John 19.

SCOTT HOEZEE

John 19:25: Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. ²⁶When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, "Woman, here is your son," and to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.

So, Darrell, we have mentioned in the previous episode, that across the fourteen stations of the cross, we do pick up a couple or so of the famous seven last words of Jesus from the cross. We noted no one gospel contains all of them, of course. John holds the record. He's got more than the other three. He has actually got three of the seven sayings. Each one of them is unique to John, including this one about his mother.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; so, near the cross stands Mary, some of the other women, and the disciple whom Jesus loved, traditionally understood as John, and Jesus addresses his mother first and then the disciple. He doesn't use their names in the text, but the tenderness of his words still ring through history: Woman, here is your son; here is your mother; and from that time on, John takes Mary into his home; and we have been very sure that the reference to the disciple whom Jesus loved is John, but in John's own gospel, he does not refer to himself by name, he calls himself the beloved disciple.

SCOTT HOEZEE

I sometimes wonder how that sat with the other ones, but oh well; but, we have read that earlier. In the upper room in John 13, we are told that the disciple Jesus loved is reclining next to Jesus; then we get to the resurrection account in John 20, when Simon Peter, and again, the beloved disciple, race to the tomb; and then at the very end of John, in John 21, after Jesus reinstates Peter, Peter then asks the fate of that other disciple, whom Jesus loved. So, those all appear to be John, the brother of James and the son of Zebedee; again, Jesus loved all his disciples, and we are not sure why John used that term for himself, but that is what he does; and so, we know that this is John in this exchange about Jesus' mother, Mary.

DARRELL DELANEY

That is really an interesting point you make, but I was thinking also too about the Roman execution, because, like you said earlier, they did these crucifixions all the time; like, it is Tuesday, we are going to have a crucifixion; it is Thursday, we are going to have two crucifixions; and a Roman execution...I think the aim was to erase a person with public humiliation and shame, but in that setting, Jesus acts as the eldest brother, who is providing for his mother. He honors the commandment to care for his parents, even while he is dying; and at the same time, he does more than arrange the housing, he creates a new household under the shadow of the cross; and now, family ties run through him, Scott.

SCOTT HOEZEE

That is interesting, because, you know, many of us know something about families, and sometimes fractured families, or in this case, a family where great tragedy is happening. The oldest son is dying on a cross. We know people, and some of us who are listening have grown up without a father or a mother in the home. We maybe carry wounds from divorce, abandonment, conflict, dysfunction. These are families for whom holidays feel more like survival than celebration. If we know that, this station kind of speaks tenderly into that ache, I think, Darrell. What is Jesus doing here? He is not even thinking about himself, which, you know, when you are dying on a cross, you couldn't blame somebody if he was thinking about himself; but Jesus thinks of others and creates a new family. Blood family matters, of course, but the spiritual family that grows out of our shared trust in Christ, that is a precious thing as well.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; I have seen this in local churches; and some people...I am sure you have seen this in local churches...where older members sit next to college students whose parents are living miles and miles away; some people have seen widows who eat Sunday dinner each week with a couple from their congregation; or a single adult becomes an uncle or an auntie to several kids in the pews; and these relationships...of course they don't replace the biological ties, but they express a new family, like a spiritual surrogate family, that Jesus forms around his cross and resurrection. So, we have our brothers and sisters who are biological, and our brothers and sisters in Christ.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It is interesting that Mary stands near that cross, Darrell, and watches her son suffer; and that sorrow runs deeper than words; and maybe...it is not in John's gospel; it is Luke, of course, but we can remember Mary's encounter with that old man, Simeon, in the temple, you know, when they brought Jesus there when he was 40 days old; and Simeon predicted that a sword would pierce Mary's soul, too. This is surely that horrible moment. God does not shield her from this, but he does surround her with faithful presence; and then, Jesus himself, in the midst of his suffering and Mary's suffering, gives her a new place to belong.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; and many believers have walked through seasons where their love for Christ brings loss or misunderstanding, but this scene assures us that no one who stays near Jesus in costly moments stands alone, because Jesus entrusts us to one another; and another thing I was wanting to think about is the tender moment that Jesus has with his mother right there, because sometimes when we look back, we see Jesus. It seems he is a little more distant. Like when the wedding happened in John 2, when his mother says: Hey, they are out of wine, and all this, he says: Woman, what has that to do with me? And then, another time when Mary and the kids are outside and they say: Well, Jesus, we need to talk to you, and he says: My mother, brothers and father and sister are the ones who are right here doing the commandments of God. But in this moment, we see that Jesus has a very tender moment, and he does focus on her and not on his own suffering.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; that is right. So, I mean, Jesus did make clear earlier that, you know, his true family was not Mary and his brothers, but the disciples and so forth. Of course, go back to the wedding at Cana in John 2: Woman,

what does this have to do with me; but, you know, I always think that Mary kind of gave him one of those mother looks, you know, because he ends up doing it, you know; I mean, then she just says: Do whatever he tells you...

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Okay, Mother; okay, Mother. So, he does it anyway; but certainly, you know, we know that Jesus did have love for his mother; and I am sure he had deep love for his earthly brothers and sisters as well; but here, since he is no longer able to do it, he takes care of his mother through the beloved disciple, John, which again, is a very tender, tender moment; and I guess, Darrell, that is kind of emblematic, right? I mean, Jesus is on the cross and he is thinking about other people...

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

That is what the cross is for; he is thinking about all of us; he is taking care of all of us. So, you know, when we ponder this twelfth station, maybe we could think a couple questions, you know; we could wonder where has Jesus given *you* spiritual mothers or brothers or sisters as a gift of his care, you know; we can think back to those significant people in our lives who were closer to us than a brother, even though they were not a brother; closer to us than a mother, even though they were not my mother: Name those people; give thanks.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; I was thinking about that. I got some names that are coming to mind right now; and secondly, where might Jesus be asking you to receive someone into your home, whether it is your literal home or in the circle of your intention and care. They could be a young believer who needs mentoring; an older saint who needs rides and conversation; or a neighbor whose story includes more grief than most. This station calls us to let the cross reshape how we define family.

So, next, as we wrap up this segment and this episode, we want to bring forth these stations together and ask what they show about the mercy and belonging that God has for us today; so, stay tuned.

Segment 3

SCOTT HOEZEE

I am Scott Hoezee, with Darrell Delaney, and you are listening to *Groundwork*, and this is the sixth episode of a seven-part series on the fourteen stations of the cross. In this episode, we have been at stations eleven and twelve: the thief on the cross asking for Jesus to remember him when he comes into his kingdom; and then Jesus' words to his mother and to his beloved disciple taking care of his mother and entrusting her to the care of the disciple, John. You know, Darrell, I think that together, these scenes show a Savior who meets guilt with mercy and loneliness with family.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; listen to how the New Testament describes this ongoing ministry, picking up in Hebrews 7:25. Speaking of Jesus, it says: Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.

So, when you hear that Jesus always lives to intercede, you just think about the fact that crucified and risen Lord continues to speak on behalf of those who draw near to God through him. So, the thief on the cross heard it in real time there, and us believers today, we still lean on that same truth, that prayer rests on the Savior who speaks for us before the Father 24/7.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly what Jesus did on the cross; speaking a word of salvation to the thief; speaking a word of comfort to his mother; that is interceding, and he has been doing it ever since. You know, one of the things that we confess in the *Heidelberg Catechism*, a key confession of the Reformed tradition that you and I are part of, how did Christ's ascension benefit us? It says it benefits us because he is interceding for us. He is at the right hand of the Father, praying for us at all times; and we see how he began that already on the cross.

Then, thinking in terms of new community, let's listen to familiar words from Paul in Ephesians 2, starting in verse 13: But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, ¹⁵by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, ¹⁶and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. ¹⁷He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. ¹⁸For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. ¹⁹Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household.

DARRELL DELANEY

I love it, because when Paul is talking about this new humanity...this fellow citizens...how foreigners and strangers become fellow citizens...he is rearranging what we consider to be those lines of relationship; and you see that Christ makes them all members of one household; and that scene with Mary and John is like a microcosm of what that is. When Jesus says this is your son and this is your mother, he is rearranging those things; and when we believe in Christ, we have been rearranged into a new family. You and I are brothers in Christ now. We would have never known each other and never met each other; and because of the redemptive work that Christ has done, we are now family; and that happens a lot of times when people trust Jesus. So, what does it mean for listeners who are doing regular things, like driving to work or washing dishes or walking the dog; how do we make this come home to you in a practical way?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Well again, let's take these two stations of the cross and bring them together. We are going to close with three points: One, no person's story is beyond the reach of mercy. As we said earlier in the program, Darrell, you know, some of us carry offenses that we just think are unforgiveable; terrible things we have said, done, thought: a broken marriage, a relapse that hurt children, a season of secret sin that still brings us shame today; and you know, the repentant thief reminds us that when we confess our sin...when we throw ourselves on Jesus...the final word over your story, my story, anyone's story, doesn't come from failure; the final word comes from the King, who promises presence. No; it does not erase consequences or undo harm we have already done; but, you know, it anchors us, Darrell, in a future anchored in grace and in mercy, instead of shame or despair.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; that is a powerful, powerful lesson. I think that we also can talk about the second one, which is no believer stands alone in the family of God; because faith in Christ gathers us into a household, where people care; where they bear one another's burdens; and they carry one another through grief; and the cross is not just for forgiveness. It creates a community...a beloved community; and when someone in your congregation or your community sits alone or stands alone: an older saint that fades from memory because their health fails, or when a younger member drifts toward isolation, this station calls the Church to move toward them. The spiritual family grows when the followers of Jesus say: You don't have to walk this season by yourself. You actually have help; you have assistance; you have love; you have prayers; you have support. I can remember when I got injured in my knee and I was up in my hospital bed at my house for weeks, the church family came alongside me. they brought meals, they continued to show love and prayers and support and hearts. They came over and prayed with me. Those are the times that I will never forget that the church body showed love and care to me; and that is how we know we are not alone. That is happening everywhere.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, nobody is beyond the reach of mercy; the thief on the cross reminds us of that. Nobody stands alone in the family of God; Jesus taking care of Mary through John shows us that. Then thirdly...kind of bringing those together...life under the cross shapes how we treat the vulnerable. You know, at Golgotha while on the cross, Jesus pays attention to the one criminal who turns toward him and to the one woman whose loss is cutting the deepest: His dear mother. Both can represent people who often get forgotten: The guilty and the grieving. Sometimes, you know, we think about people in jail. We talked about them earlier. There is a ministry called Forgotten Man Ministries because we lock them up and throw away the key and then we forget about them. Don't do that, right?

DARRELL DELANEY

Reach the Forgotten, yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; followers of Christ are called to keep the marginalized and the people under the invisible fringes of life clearly in front of us whether they are in prison, whether they are fighting addiction, whether they are just kind of lonely and kind of living like a hermit. These are the people who the cross of Jesus calls us to reach out to.

DARRELL DELANEY

Now, when the Church remembers this, the stations of the cross become more than just a Lenten practice, Scott. They become a pattern of discipleship throughout the entire year. We remember that forgiveness reaches the worst moments, and that family gathered around Jesus...under Jesus...stretches wider than biology or preference. So, when we sit with both stations eleven and twelve, we can linger with these two simple prayers: The first one is: Lord Jesus, remember me and remember those who I am tempted to write off; and the second is: Lord Jesus, show me who you are giving me to and who you are giving to me. So, those two prayers line up with what happened on Calvary that day, and the Spirit delights to answer in fresh ways in our homes and neighborhoods.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; and those are two very beautiful, simple prayers that we can ponder during Lent and ponder through these two stations of the cross; and again, God delights to hear those prayers. God delights to forgive us...he cannot wait to forgive us. So, come to God and go to him, and when you do, you know you will be forgiven and restored; thanks be to God.

Well, thank you for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We hope you will join us next time as we conclude our journey through the stations of the cross by reflecting on station thirteen, Jesus' death; and station fourteen, his burial. We will also celebrate how the story continues on Easter morning. Connect with us now at groundworkonline.com to share what *Groundwork* means to you or tell us what you would like to hear discussed next on *Groundwork*.

DARRELL DELANEY

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