

"Today You Will Be with Me in Paradise"

*A meditation offered by the Rev. Jake Dell, Deacon,
at The Three Hours service, April 6, 2012.*

Good Friday.

Based on Luke 23: 39-44a.

Even when Jesus was in the most pain, he was able to offer a comforting word to a dying man.

Now, Jesus could have ignored him.

Just as many of us do when we are absorbed in our own problems.

But we get hurt when other people ignore us.

I recently figured out that there are four reasons why people usually don't respond.

The reasons I've come up with are:

One, the person isn't interested.

Two, by responding, the person will be forced to acknowledge something that is embarrassing or awkward.

Three, the person is trying to manipulate or control the situation.

Four, the person won't respond because he or she just doesn't have to.

The first is common when you've met someone new. Numbers or business cards are exchanged. You send a follow up and there's ... silence.

"I thought we really had a connection," you might say to yourself as you shrug your shoulders and move on.

The second is simply avoiding the situation.

"I'm not going to take responsibility for what I've done or for what I've failed to do."

That kind of silence leads to festering.

And a festering silence kills relationships.

Relationships of any kind.

Business relationships.

Romantic relationships.

Mother and daughter, father and son.

A friend of mine once told me, "We're pretty good at the beginnings and middles of things, but not very good at their endings."

He's right.

Think of the rush of hope and anticipation at the beginning of something new.

Think of the satisfaction and acceptance we feel during its middle.

Now, contrast that with the silence of its ending.

We're left wondering, "What did I do wrong?"

It's the silence that hurts us.

If the second reason can be used to avoid responsibility and to end a relationship, then the third is sometimes used to keep a dysfunctional one going.

It's called the silent treatment.

It's different from the first two.

It's not ignoring and it's not avoidance.

Rather, it's manipulation. It's trying to get control of someone.

The silent treatment works by making the other person uncomfortable.

It works by making them feel bad.

Can you imagine how the thief would have felt if Jesus had given him the silent treatment?

The fourth involves having a feeling of superiority—and that makes it different from the first three.

"I'm too busy for you."

"I don't have the time."

"You're not worth it to me."

"Responding to you would not benefit me in any way. Moreover, you can't make me."

Now Jesus could have used any of these as his reason not to respond to the criminal.

But he didn't do that.

Instead, he responded by saying "Today you're going to go to paradise with me!"

He didn't have to answer the criminal; he didn't know him.

He could have stayed silent in the face of certain death.

He could have thought to himself: "I'm the Son of God. I don't deserve this. But this man ... this man is a criminal."

But he didn't.

Instead, he chose to respond with empathy and compassion.

Just as the widow gave charity from her poverty, so Jesus gave comfort from his pain.

Cross spoke to cross that day.

And each of us, with our own crosses to bear, can do the same thing Jesus did.

We can comfort others from our own suffering.

It's better than not responding, isn't it?

Go ahead!

Break this silence that only hurts more the longer we ignore it.

On this day, as on every day, let your cross do the talking.