

Jesus said to the criminal on the cross, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.”. Luke 23: 43

I recall accompanying an Inupiat elder some years ago on her very first trip outside of Alaska. It was springtime in Seattle. As she gazed out her car window, she exclaimed, “ Gee this must be paradise.”

Indeed there are many towns throughout the world named “paradise.” People perhaps were captured by some sense of “at last” or “this is it!”

The word “paradise” comes from the Greek word paridiso. It is used only three times in the New Testament. In Revelation 2:7 it is given as the location of the “tree of life.” It is the same Greek word used in the Greek Old Testament for “garden” – as in the Garden of Eden at the beginning of time in Genesis.

All of this fits well with our understanding of the Gospel of Luke. Jesus’ death depicts an un-doing of the curse of Adam – and our curse as humanity. Here on the cross, Jesus is initiating and inviting the criminal to a new creation - the newness that Christ’s life and death brings in.

This newness, this taste of “paradise,” happens not some time in the future. But TODAY. Today Christ is bringing a new hope, a new life, a new beautiful creation where God once again is walking among us in the garden of life.

I used to visit the local prison on a regular basis in Nome. Often a church member would go with me and he happened to have been a former police officer. Inevitably at the worship service, he would remind the prisoners of this bible verse in Luke and say the first person Jesus opened the door to paradise for was a criminal. The first one Jesus remembered in his kingdom, per their request, was a criminal. And so we would do well to identify with this humble criminal hanging on the cross next to Jesus.

Beggars for sure are we all. But saved by a very gracious King. Amen. Happy Easter!