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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, "**I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.**"

Word 2

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DRAMA

Narrator: Jesus has been hanging on the cross for an hour or so now. During this time of torture a mixture of people has paraded in front of the crosses. In some of the people there is obvious sorrow. For some of the people it is only curiosity that brings them to observe the crucifixions that day. Others show a sense of contempt, and even victory over Jesus, whom they seem to consider their enemy.

One of the Pharisees, a religious leader of Jesus' time, is one of those who seems almost happy to see Jesus on the cross. In fact, the two men crucified on each side of Jesus, in the midst of their pain, have been insulting the Lord. This makes this Pharisee seem even more pleased.

Mary 1 (Magdalene): It's bad enough that our Lord is being tortured on the cross. Now these others can't even leave him alone. Why can't they just let him suffer in peace?

Mary 2 (Jesus' mother): It pains me to see the suffering too, Mary. But notice, he has not answered back in anger. In fact, there even seems to be a sad love on his face as these men reject him.

Pharisee: (Apart from the women, but looking at the cross) Finally! Finally he understands that you can't blaspheme, you can't claim to be the son of God without consequences.

Mary 1: You know, Mary. Even in his suffering, his actions are showing that he is the son of God. Who else would suffer so silently?

Pharisee: (mocking) If you're the son of God, Jesus, why don't you save yourself? (Pause) See, even this other criminal wants you to save him, Jesus. Why don't you do it? Can't you perform a miracle?

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Mary 2: Did you hear that Mary. Even as he is criticized by the crowds, and mocked by the thief. He still acts in love. He still acts to save. He told this other thief that today he would be in paradise with him.

Pharisee: No, No. You're on a cross. You can't go giving paradise to people. Don't you understand?

Mary 1: I understand, the other criminal understands. It's this Pharisee who doesn't realize who is on the cross.

INTRO - Carol Warren is in heaven today by the love of Jesus. She died on January 6, and until August was the Director of Lutheran Social Services of Alaska. I had a number of conversations with Carol. Working at LSSA was not necessarily easy. When dealing with people in need, well sometimes people are in need because of their own choices . . . and sometimes not. Sometimes people in need in today's world have developed an attitude fostered by our government of, 'you owe me help.' So there is often no thanks. Sometimes when help is given to people in deep need the person helping knows it is only a bandaid, and the bigger problem still exists. So, you can wonder if you are doing any good. Helping those in need is not easy, but it is the call of the Lord to the church. In James, the church is told **27 Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress.** In other words, God's people are called to help the needy and helpless, even if it is not easy. We might call that job for God's children, THE CROSS OF MERCY.

I. Please look with me at tonight's Gospel lesson, this account of our Lord on the cross.

A. Jesus is in deep suffering.

1. He has been unfairly arrested, tried, and mocked.
2. He has been beaten and nailed to the cross, and is suffering from loss of blood, thirst, and suffocation.
3. Most of his friends have deserted him.
4. In the midst of his suffering, two common criminals are mocking him.

B. Yet, in the midst of His dying, one of the criminals appeals to Jesus.

1. Listen again. ³⁹ **One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: "Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!"** ⁴⁰ **But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence?"** ⁴¹ **We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong."** ⁴² **Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."**
2. Imagine as you are dying, a needy person who in this case caused his own troubles asks you for help!
3. And Jesus' response? ⁴³ **Jesus answered him, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."** (NIV)
4. Jesus as the true man had compassion on another needy person in their moment of suffering.
5. Jesus, as the Son of God, recognized the repentance and faith of the other man on the cross, and Jesus forgave Him and called the thief to heaven.

C. God calls us to pick up the cross of mercy.

1. We don't have to go looking for people in need, we will be confronted.
2. It will be inconvenient, take time and resources.
3. And in truth, we will personally NOT be able to meet all the needs.
4. Nevertheless, we are called to pick up the cross of mercy, to show Compassion, Pity, and Kindness, even when it is not deserved.

II. Parents, what happens when you ask your children to do the dishes? Sometimes they might say ok, but at other times we might hear excuses. People often run from difficult jobs or try to get out of them. Please let me share a Bible verse with you, however, which we read in Promise Keepers last night.

A. Ephesians 2:1-3 says, Ephesians 2:1 **As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, 2 in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. 3 All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.**

1. Did you hear that?
2. WE were sinful, and dead in those sins, and unable to help ourselves.

B. Now **4 But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in MERCY, 5 made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions-- it is by grace you have been saved.**

1. We were in need.
2. Because of His love, and grace, and mercy God has saved us in Jesus.

C.. Jesus is not just offering help, and pity, and compassion to the thief on the cross, from HIS cross, Jesus is calling us to His mercy.

D. How can we not pick up our cross and show mercy to others in need?

?CONCLUSION - I want to close with a story. I've told some of you. I am a little hesitant to share this story, simply because my daughter is in the story, but I'll share it anyway.

Before she left for college, my daughter was unsure where to go to School. She liked the Lutheran college in MN, but then she visited Seward, NE, with Jamie and others from our church. She got a scholarship to Valparaiso Lutheran University in Indiana, but thought she might learn more and have a broader experience at the Lutheran College in California. Finally she went to Valparaiso, and seemed to do well. She got 1 B, and all the rest A's the first semester. But, during Christmas break, the night before she went back to college, she shared doubts with my wife that she was having. She wasn't sure Valpo was where she should be. This was supposed to be a Christian school, a Lutheran School. But, there were kids that drank, and partied, and did not live like their faith made a difference. She went back to school, looking to enroll in other schools.

Now, as soon as Mary got back to school she was asked to apply to be a Resident Advisor, an 'RA.' She had made friends with some other Christians girls, and most of them were asked too, and they thought they would all try to get in one dorm and straighten that dorm up. Sounds like my daughter, if you know her.

However, she called a couple of weeks ago, and was excited by a snow day, then she told my wife a story. Mary and her friends, she said, had been spending time helping another girl at college. This girl had problems. She cut herself. She was sometimes suicidal. She had been raised in an abusive home, and was living in a foster home when

she came to college. The girl told Mary that the first Christmas in her foster home she got a present of pajamas. The girl cried because she'd never been given anything like that before. Christmas had been a time for her when she got up early and made coffee, and then went and hid because people were drinking. Mary and her friends had sent the fellow student to the campus chaplain. That helped, because the chaplain not only listened, like her expensive counselors, but the chaplain also prayed for her and with her. Mary said, the girl said, she had been out one night not too long ago, and been raped, and it brought everything back. Mary said, the girl told her that she and her friends was the reason she was even there. And, then she asked Mary and her friends to help her be baptized. It is going to happen this Easter.

My little girl is growing. God has helped her to pick up the cross of mercy. May he bless you in this way too.

