

# Biblical Background

LUKE 23:35-43

**GEOGRAPHICAL SETTING:** Golgotha, a high place just outside the wall of the old city in Jerusalem. Crucifixions were held there to put “the fear of God” in everyone as they came and left the city on their daily outings.

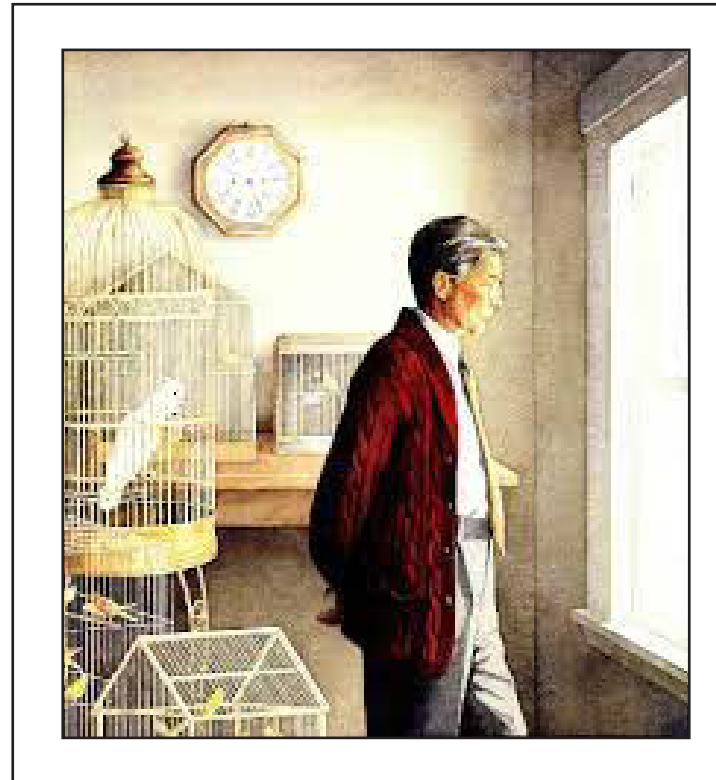
**TERMS: Paradise** The repentant thief was promised paradise by Jesus. It is difficult to explain what paradise is, because in first century Judaism there were divergent opinions on everything. At best, one could say that paradise belongs to a long-standing Old Testament biblical expectation that “the end will be like the beginning”. Paradise is a condensed symbol of the Genesis story, which offers guidance for dealing with sin and death. Through the Genesis story and Adams desire to be like God the gates of Paradise become closed. Through Jesus and his surrender to God’s will in all things, the gates of Paradise are reopened.

**CULTURAL INSIGHT:** The Jewish people knew the scripture stories by heart. They had no way of reading, so as a community they had a collective memory. The term paradise would immediately hearken them back to Adam and Eve in the Garden. In Jesus’ choice of words the listener is making the connection. It is of Jewish and Christian belief that Adam, in choosing the path of dominion he loses, and paradise is lost seemingly forever. Through Adam’s choice, humans become subject to sin and death. The results leave humanity separated from God, resulting in being victim to sin and death. Jesus, in stark contrast to Adam, when offered power over the whole world, rejects it, and instead chooses death on a cross. He remained subject to only God’s will. Through Jesus’ willingness and obedience, he allowed God to remain the Lord over sin and death. Jesus offers a restoration of sin and freedom over death through opening the path to eternal life. A restoration of the garden, paradise. Through this act of surrender in Jesus’ death on the cross, the hearer would understand that the act of Adam’s quest of dominion is redeemed, and paradise is gained once again through Jesus’ sacrificial emptying.

**INSIGHTS INTO MEANING:** The temptations here of Jesus are very similar to the ones he encountered in the desert at the beginning of his public ministry. The first ones were given to him by the devil. The second set on the cross by the rulers of the day. It could be that the writer of the gospel wanted the listener to make those connections. The three challenges from the rulers are “let him save himself”, “save yourself”, “save yourself and us”. In both sets of challenges at the cross, and in the desert, Jesus is urged to defy death. The point here is because Jesus does not seek to defy death, but surrenders to the will of his Father, and in doing so he conquers both sin and death. This makes Jesus king, the King over sin and death. Through his surrender, the binding finality of sin and death are broken free. Life does not end in sin and death, Jesus shows us the way. Liberation is found through following Jesus’ way of surrender to God thus giving SIGHT to our true selves, and the deeper reality of our inner lives. Through death to our false self, we will find life in God’s Spirit, and restoration of union of paradise. Here and now, both in this world and into the next.

# Family Activities

SHARING THE MISSION AT HOME  
AND IN THE WORLD



**QUESTION OF THE WEEK:** Why would people leave their homes and families in search of a new homeland? Have any of your family members left poor conditions in other countries to search for a better world for their families? Do you think this would be hard to do? Why?

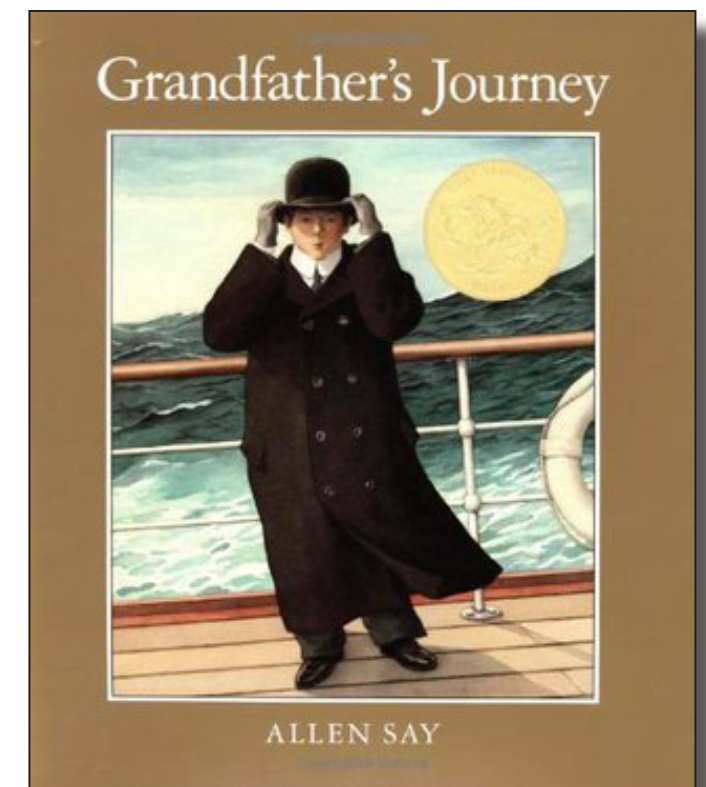
**GOSPEL CHARACTER QUALITIES:** BEING SACRIFICIAL  
EYES FOR PLURALISM

**ADDITIONAL FAMILY ACTIVITIES:** Discuss as a family how each of you imagines paradise. What paradise you think Jesus promised to the thief? Why do you think Jesus left the paradise of heaven to come down to earth? What do you think heaven will be like? Create a drawing, story, poem, or collage of what you imagine together.

Feast of Christ the King  
Cycle C

# Living Grace

“CAN WE STILL THE LONGING IN OUR HEARTS?”



In *Grandfather's Journey*, we meet the author's grandfather who left his home in Japan when he was a young man to explore the world. He began his journey by crossing the Pacific Ocean on a steamship, then wandered the deserts, farmlands, and cities of North America. Allen Say describes his family's unique cross-cultural experience and conveys his own love for his two countries. He describes the strong and constant desire to be in both places at once: When in one country, he invariably misses the other. His grandfather, he tells us, would understand. Say illustrates the bridging of two disparate cultures and the desire to be in two places at once. This story speaks to a universal experience, as well as the deeply personal ties of family to place, and what it means to be at home in more than one country.

# Art & Faith

CELEBRATING THE BEAUTY & TRADITION  
OF SACRED ART



CRUCIFIXION

*Illumination Manuscript on parchment from the Syriac Rabbula Gospels ~ 586 AD  
Biblioteca Medicea-Laurenziana ~ Florence, Italy*

## EXPLORING THE ART:

## STORY IN SYMBOLISM

This image is the earliest known artistic representation of the Crucifixion. It is filled with the symbols that we find in almost every Crucifixion scene throughout history. Standardizing the symbols and attributes of a subject like the Crucifixion helps viewers identify important figures and events. Consider that in many places throughout time most people couldn't read, and images played an important role to help diverse audiences learn stories. For instance, in Renaissance Europe, perhaps as many as 95% of people couldn't read! Maintaining a standardized iconography of the most important moments in Christian theology was one way to help Christians "read" Biblical stories or the lives of saints. A consistent set of signs, symbols, and attributes allow us to identify the subject matter over centuries and across the globe - no matter the style of the artwork.

This image not only illustrates the scene, but also tells the story. On the left are Mary and John the Evangelist, on the right are three mourning women. Two figures beside the cross reach upward to Christ - on the right is a man who holds up before Christ a sponge on a stick, soaked with sour wine from a bucket in his hand. On the right is a man labeled "Longinos," the name assigned to the soldier who pierced the side of Christ to certify his death. The fact that Christ was crucified between thieves, one on his right and one on his left, was not lost on the writers of the gospels. They recognized it as a shockingly literal fulfillment of the prophecy that God's servant would be "numbered among transgressors" (Isaiah 53:12). The fact that one of the transgressors recognized the Son of God and the other did not, is also a fact filled with significance, setting up the crucified Christ as the judge who in person divides between these two ways.

# Sunday Gospel

LUKE 23:35-43

The rulers sneered at Jesus and said,  
"He saved others, let him save himself  
if he is the chosen one, the Christ of God."  
Even the soldiers jeered at him.  
As they approached to offer him wine they called out,  
"If you are King of the Jews, save yourself."  
Above him there was an inscription that read,  
"This is the King of the Jews."

Now one of the criminals hanging there reviled Jesus, saying,  
"Are you not the Christ?  
Save yourself and us."  
The other, however, rebuking him, said in reply,  
"Have you no fear of God,  
for you are subject to the same condemnation?  
And indeed, we have been condemned justly,  
for the sentence we received corresponds to our crimes,  
but this man has done nothing criminal."  
Then he said,  
"Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."  
He replied to him,  
"Amen, I say to you,  
today you will be with me in Paradise."

Read-aloud video link:

**GRANDFATHER'S JOURNEY**

Written & Illustrated by Allen Say

## Making the Connections

FOR ADULTS

### STANDING ON THE PRECIPICE OF TWO WORLDS

What an unusual setting the church chooses to help us focus on this Sunday's feast of Christ the King. In the Gospel, the rulers and soldiers are sneering at Jesus, "Save yourself if you are the 'King of The Jews'". To mock him they even make a sign to hang above his head on the cross, "This is the King of the Jews". While they are in agony and dying, Jesus is in conversation with two thieves who are being tortured and killed for their crimes alongside him. One of the thieves sees something in Jesus. Jesus is king, but not just for the Jews. In a spirit of sorrow and repentance for his crimes, in his poverty of spirit, this criminal SEES what is true. He sees what the rulers and the soldiers are blind to.

Jesus sees that this man in his true "sight". Like the thief, repentance opens up truth in our hearts. Through repentance, our eyes become open and we SEE! We can see God's truth for the whole world. We can see realities that are true for heaven and earth. Repentance leads us to paradise - toward a new heavenly realm. This is the kingdom that Jesus, through his death and resurrection, came to show us. Repentance opens the way for the humble saint to SEE the eternal world in which we were made for. Jesus brings the kingdom of heaven down to us on earth.

In our children's story, we learn of a grandfather whose heart lives in two worlds. The story closes with words from the grandson, "The funny thing is, that the moment I am in one country, I am homesick for the other". This story illustrates how Jesus lived, and how as Christians we now live. It took great courage for the Grandfather all on his own to venture out to a new world. He fell in love with America and especially California as that's where he settled. For people from countries where there is oppression, America symbolizes a bit of heaven. People whose countries were enemies could be friends in America. That is a lot of what the gospel is telling us today.

**Jesus came not just to open the fullness of a relationship with God to the Jews. He came to redeem the whole world, and to open up the doors of a new world, heaven for all. We now play can play our part to bring the new world here...., as Jesus prayed in the Our Father, we as a community of believers we daily pray..."on earth as it is in heaven".**

## Making the Connections

FOR CHILDREN

**YOUR STORY:** Do you know how your relatives came to this country? Have you heard their stories of the "old country"? Is your family in contact with anyone from there? Do people in your family go back and forth? Why is it important to stay connected? What are the bridges that keep you connected? Do you have relatives and loved ones who have gone on to heaven? How do you stay close to them? Does it give you peace and strength to find ways to do so? Why do you think that is? How does it make you and your family stronger? What qualities do you value from the "old country" that you want to bring here? What qualities of heaven do you want to live out here on earth?

**THE CHILDREN'S STORY:** Grandfather went out on a journey all alone. What was his mission? Why do you think Grandfather left his home country? What did he discover in his new country? What did Grandfather sacrifice in leaving his home? What did he gain? What helped them to stand in both worlds? It was hard for grandfather, but he made things easier for his children and grandchildren. How are Jesus and Grandfather alike? How did Jesus make things easier for us?

**THE GOSPEL STORY:** Who is Jesus surrounded by when he is on the cross? How might he feel alone in his suffering, even when surrounded by so many people? Who is for him? Who is against him? How does Jesus relate to the thieves on the cross? Does he build bridges, even in his suffering? Jesus in this moment stands on the precipice of heaven and earth. What decisions do the criminals make? Who do they choose to stand with, and what difference does it make?