

Old Orchard Church

Third Sunday in Lent

March 15, 2009 — 10:15 to 11:45 a.m.

"Ronald, it's going to look like you lied."

"I'm not lying. I didn't do it."

But it didn't matter. I was a goner as long as [the witness] sat there pointing the finger at me. "Yeah, you're innocent," smirked the guards at the jail.

"You and everyone else here, right, Cotton?" It was a big joke....

I'll never forget that judge spinning around in his chair—if looks could kill, I'd have been dead then. And maybe better off. With that bond, I was going to remain in Alamance County Jail in Graham until the trial. I turned twenty-three four days before Christmas inside that jail. My whole life was supposed to be ahead of me, but my life looked like it was already over.

The man, Jesus, was accused of the most monstrous thing of all: being an instrument of the devil, when in fact, he was the eternal Son of God. He who was absolute and pure Goodness, ultimate Love, was accused of being the very incarnation of Evil, ultimate selfishness. Yet, he didn't seek revenge. He entrusted himself to his Father in heaven, knowing he would vindicate him. And he did—in the resurrection of his Son. Ron Cotton, it seems, became a follower of Jesus Christ while in prison, and readily forgave his accuser upon his exoneration. Being joined to Christ, we can actually begin to be like him—not perfectly, but still, really. And the world will notice.

—Ron Lutjens



Alleluia, My Father

By Tim Cullen

See words in print copy.

None of the rulers of this age understood [the secret and hidden wisdom of God], for if they had they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

I Corinthians 2:8

Celebrating Jesus, Divine Son of Man: Misunderstood and Misused

Never was anyone more misunderstood
than when Jesus,
the Lord of Glory and the Prince of Life,
was dragged into court and put to death
as a common criminal.

The One who set the planets in orbit
was ridiculed as an imposter;

He who knows every secret of the universe,
in mockery was taunted to see
through his blindfold.

Ah sweet Lord, come to me
when I am misunderstood;
Calm me when I am misused,
and heal the rage of my indignation.

Work in me daily
the will to entrust
my vindication to God,

even as you did, for my sake.

Receive my thanks and my worship,
O faithful Savior!

Today's Scripture

Old Testament Lesson: I Chronicles 36:11-16; Isaiah 6:8-10

New Testament Lesson: Matthew 23:29-39

Sermon Series on Matthew

"Getting Into the Party"

Matthew 22:1-14

Ron Lutjens, senior pastor, preaching

We celebrate the Lord's Supper weekly—and in a circle, at the end of worship. A word of direction is given, and with this everyone stands and moves to the walls. The cup is passed in two forms: in a chalice and then in small individual cups. You are free to choose.

And as this is the Supper of the Lord Christ, please listen to the instructions we give as to what qualifies a visitor to participate. **But whether you intend to take communion or not, please join us in the circle.**

What It Feels Like

What does it feel like to be misunderstood and misused? Most of us have been wrongly accused of small things—and we know the pain, the rage, the deep sense of betrayal we feel even in that; the impulse to strike back in desperate anger. But how would you feel if you were accused of a terrible crime you didn't commit? That happened to Ron Cotton in 1984. After spending 11 years in prison, he was exonerated in 1995 by DNA testing and the subsequent confession of the real criminal. But here's how he describes what he felt like at the time of his trial and later, in a new book called, *Picking Cotton*, (2009):

"Cotton...we know it was you."

"No, no. You got the wrong guy." It felt like the walls were closing in on me. My blood was boiling. The heat spread over me, my muscles tensed with anger. I had an impulse to grab this cop by the collar and slam him against the wall. Maybe then he'd listen to me. But I bit the inside of my cheek, knowing that doing something like that would have made everything worse. They would have just piled on more charges.....

During the trial, I would steal a few glances at [my accuser] thinking, Why? Why are you doing this?....The jurors, the DAs, the cops—all of them looked at me like I was something they wanted to spit at and stomp into the ground. In response, I adopted the guarded look I learned long ago when dealing with the authorities, when it seemed like they could do or say whatever they wanted, regardless. I knew I was goner: I just didn't know how bad it was going to be.

On January 18, 1985, I was sentenced to life in prison plus fifty years. I stood there as the judge read my sentence. He called me one of the most dangerous men he had ever met; the district attorney said I was a "menace to society." I could scarcely look at anyone, but I caught a glimpse of my mom and some of my sisters who were able to make it to court that day. They were stunned, like someone had just slapped them. I pinched my right arm as hard as I could. The crescent indent marks on my skin appeared just as the court officers moved in to take me away: This was a nightmare I couldn't wake up from.....

"How long you got

"Life plus fifty," I said, not looking at him [the other inmate].

"Whatcha in for?" he pressed on.

Finally, I turned to face him. "Look, man, it's none of your business. I don't want to be bothered right now."

He left the room and I laid down on my bunk. It felt like even God had forgotten about me. The weight of the world was on me, sucking me down into a darkness I didn't think I could swim out of....

"You want to tell me again where you were on July 28th...[his lawyer] said.

I sighed, explaining that I'd mixed up my days.

(continued on back)