

First  Lutheran
CHURCH



THE
KINGDOM
OF GOD IS NEAR

Sermon Series November 9-23, 2025

THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS NEAR

Sermon Series

November 9 - November 23, 2025

In a political climate where we are having “No Kings” Parades, people are beginning to question what it means to be a king. We are fascinated with England’s royal family. We desire freedom, yet we crave being led. As we prepare to celebrate “Christ the King” Sunday, we try in the church to identify the true king.

November 9, 2025: Let’s Talk Resurrection

November 16, 2025: From Life to Death and Death To Life

November 23, 2025: Who Is Jesus?

Resource:

ELCA Lectionary Year C

Prepared by Pam Miller, Adult Ministry Coordinator

According to Frederick Buechner

Passionate loyalty, adoration, terror, awe—no words are perhaps too strong to describe the feelings evoked in his subjects by the mere sight of him, and it's no wonder. He held the power of life and death over them. Their destiny was in his keeping. He defended the kingdom against all enemies, both from within and from without. He was the kingdom. If he rejoiced, it rejoiced with him. If he was angry, the earth trembled and the crops might fail.

“Who is this king of glory? The Lord of hosts, he is the King of glory!” proclaims the Psalmist (24:10). This rich metaphor is used again and again in scripture. Yahweh alone was King over Israel, the prophets thundered: to be feared, to be loved, above all else to be obeyed. When the people decided they wanted a king of flesh and blood like all the other nations, Samuel warned them that the consequences would be tragic (1 Samuel 8:4-18), and history proved him correct in every particular. In the long run, Israel as king and kingdom vanished from history altogether.

When Jesus entered Jerusalem for the first time, it was as King and Son of David that his followers hailed him. If it was a king like David, the conquering hero that they were looking for, they were of course bitterly disappointed. What they got was a king like David, the father, who, when he heard of his treacherous son's death, went up to his chamber and wept. “Would I had died instead of thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!” he cried out. They were the most kingly words he ever uttered.

November 9, 2025
Let's Talk Resurrection

We worship on the first day of the week because Jesus was raised on that day. Every Sunday is a little Easter. This Sunday feels more like Easter than many as the appointed texts celebrate the reality of the resurrection. Live it up this Lord's day. Our God is the God of the living.

Opening Prayer: O God, our eternal redeemer, by the presence of your Spirit, you renew and direct our hearts. Keep always in our mind the end of all things and the day of judgement. Inspire us for a holy life here, and bring us to the joy of the resurrection, through Jesus Christ our Savior and Lord. Amen

Sermon Reflection:

As you reflect on the sermon, what stands out as being particularly helpful, insightful, or difficult to grasp?

2 Thessalonians 2:1-5, 13-17 The coming of the Lord Jesus.

This portion of the letter provides encouragement for the church at Thessalonica during a time of confusion and opposition, as some allowed their concern over Jesus' imminent return to divert them from the central teachings of the gospel.

Gospel Reading: Luke 20:27-38 Jesus speaks of the resurrection; the God of the living. Some Sadducees, who do not believe in the resurrection of the dead, try to trap Jesus. They formulate the convoluted case of a serial widow who marries a succession of seven brothers. Jesus responds by teaching about God, to whom all are alive and in whom all relationships are fulfilled.

Notes:

Daily Discipleship

Sunday, November 6-12 (C) - Luke 20:27-38

Discipleship: *A New Life*

Focus Question: *What will life be like after you are resurrected?*

word of life

“Indeed they cannot die anymore, because they are like angels and are children of God, being children of the resurrection.” Luke 20:36 (NRSV)

Read Luke 20:27-38

Luke 20 describes several incidents where the chief priests, scribes, elders, and Sadducees test Jesus with their questions. Although they challenge his authority and try to trap him in his responses, they are not successful. “And they were not able in the presence of the people to trap him by what he said; and being amazed by his answer, they became silent.” (Luke 20:26 NRSV)

1. *Why would the religious leaders try to trap Jesus?*
2. *Does this type of testing and questioning continue today? How so?*

The Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection. They were a conservative religious group who based their beliefs on only the first five books of Moses. Since there is no mention of resurrection in these books, the Sadducees dismissed this theological belief. Thus, it is quite suspicious for them to ask Jesus about the resurrection.

And yet, the Sadducees are concerned about the resurrection of a woman who has had the misfortune of marrying men who die while being married to her and before parenting a child. By law, in order to carry on her husband’s line, a childless woman was required to marry the brother of the deceased husband. By the end, she has married seven brothers. The Sadducees want to know which husband she will have after death.

3. *How realistic is this example?*
4. *Why would the Sadducees spend any time speculating about a topic which they did not believe?*
5. *What possible answer might the Sadducees have been looking for?*

Jesus responds despite the obvious trap by the Sadducees. He explains the difference between life in this world and life after the resurrection. It is simply inappropriate to take the patterns and expectations associated with life on earth and transfer them to eternal life. In offering such a response, Jesus never challenges the issue of resurrection. Instead, he accepts resurrection as a reality, and does not question the theological basis for it.

6. *Do you think this would have satisfied the Sadducees?*
7. *Does it appear Jesus was rattled by the question? Why or why not?*

Jesus makes a special reference back to the Sadducee’s beloved Moses. As the Lord spoke to him in the burning bush, the Lord claimed to be the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. This was a present claim as if Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were living. God is a God of the living and not the dead.

An important theological foundation is being laid. Resurrection is not a passing fad, but it is part of God’s plan even when people cannot grasp it. Jesus will make resurrection a reality in his life and for his followers.

8. *What does it mean for God to be the God of the living and not the dead?*
9. *What does it mean for you personally?*

word among us

Jamie and her dad laid on their backs on the hill outside of their home. It was a tradition to find faces, animals, and objects in the white fluffy clouds above their heads. They could not always find each other's objects in the clouds, but they had fun trying. Out of the blue, Jamie asked her dad, "What will I look like in heaven? Will you know me?"

1. *If you were Jamie's dad, how would you answer?*
2. *Will you be able to recognize loved ones in heaven? How so?*
3. *How do we know what life will be like after the resurrection?*

The Sadducees tried to trap Jesus with their questions about the resurrection. They didn't even believe in the resurrection. Imagine non-believers approach you with questions about Jesus. You sense they are attempting to trap you.

4. *How would you respond?*
5. *What are things not to say?*

Imagine someone comes to you who has not heard about Jesus or life after death. This person is genuinely concerned and interested in resurrection.

6. *How would you respond to that person?*
7. *Compare and contrast your responses in these two situations.*
8. *How often does someone talk to you about faith?*
9. *What would need to change in order to have more of these conversations?*

Jesus describes the dead as "like angels and are children of the resurrection" (Luke 20:36 NRSV) Life after our resurrection is beyond our grasp and understanding. No doubt we want to imagine it, but Jesus pushes the description beyond our reach. Instead we are to trust in God to care for us like a loving parent cares for a child.

10. *What questions do you have about resurrection?*
11. *Is it possible to both trust and have questions? How so?*

God is God of all – creation, the dead, and the living. Nothing is beyond the realm of God. Resurrection is part of God's plan. As humans, we have to be patient as God unfolds the plan for life and resurrection. In Jesus Christ, we get a glimpse of resurrection.

Even though Jesus prepared his disciples and followers, they were not anticipating the reality of resurrection. Their lives and faith were turned upside down. To their credit, the disciples became powerful and effective witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus as they proclaimed a living God. No doubt, some tried to trap and deter them, but they kept their faith.

12. *How do you keep your faith in the resurrection?*
13. *What do you look forward to in the resurrection?*

Prayer

Resurrected Christ, thank you for the promise and reality of resurrection. Open my life to the opportunities to share the good news with others. Amen.

Dig Deeper

Job 19:23-27a

last word

Take a walk and imagine life after the resurrection.



Daily Discipleship

Written by John and Robin McCullough-Bade

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November 16, 2025
From Life to Death and Death to Life

The end is near. There is no doubt about it. The warnings are dire. The tone of today's texts is ominous. But the baptized know how to live in the meantime. The baptized are strengthened for the living of these days in word and sacrament. The baptized rally around the invitation of the apostle: "Do not be weary in doing what is right."

Opening Prayer: O God, the protector of all who trust in you, without you nothing is strong, nothing is holy. Embrace us with your mercy, that with you as our ruler and guide, we may live through what is temporary without losing what is eternal, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen

Sermon Reflection:

As you reflect on the sermon, what stands out as being particularly helpful, insightful, or difficult to grasp?

2 Thessalonians 3:6-13 Do not be idle, but do what is right for the sake of Christ. Some members of the Thessalonian community, because of their belief in the nearness of Christ's return, had ceased to work, living off the generosity of other members of the community. The writer of this letter warns them bluntly that if they want to eat, they need to work.

Gospel Reading: Luke 21:5-19 Jesus speaks of wars, endurance, betrayal, and suffering for his sake.

As history moves toward God's fulfillment, there will be frightening signs and events. Before the end, believers will draw strength from their relationship to God and will be given the words they need to testify and to endure without fear.

Notes:

Daily Discipleship

November 13-19 (C) - Luke 21:5-19

Discipleship: *A New Preparedness*

Focus Question: *If the world would end tomorrow, would you be prepared?*

word of life

And he said, "Beware that you are not led astray; for many will come in my name and say 'I am he!' and, 'The time is near!' Do no go after them." Luke 21:8 (NRSV)

Read Luke 21:5-19

This passage is considered part of the apocalyptic literature (ie. - writings about the end of time) of the Bible and describes God's final judgment and redemption. It is part of a larger section (Luke 21:5-38) which focuses on the end of time. Parallels can be found in Mark 13 and Matthew 24:1-44. If you have time, read through each section and make comparisons.

Most people do not spend time pondering if, when, and how the end of the earth might come to pass. Thus, it may be uncomfortable and unsettling to hear Jesus devote precious time and energy to preparing his disciples.

1. *How much time this week did you spend reflecting on the end of time?*
2. *What have you heard about the end of time?*
3. *Why do you suspect we are not more concerned about this?*

The setting for this passage is the temple in Jerusalem. The temple had been destroyed in 587 BC by the Babylonians who took the Jews to live in exile. During the exile, the Jews dreamed of returning to the land promised their ancestors and rebuilding the temple. In 538 BC, under the decree of Cyrus, the Jews were allowed to return. On their return, a high priority was to rebuild the temple. Thus, for Jesus to prophesize about the destruction of the temple would have stirred a strong reaction. (In fact, the Romans would destroy the temple in A.D 70.)

4. *What do you know about the temple?*
5. *What did the temple represent to the people?*

Jesus is concerned about more than a building. He moves beyond the destruction of the temple to discuss the end of all time. All time is included under God's reign – even the end of time. Jesus warns his followers to be observant in the present time so they might be prepared for God's judgment. They are to watch for the signs of the end of time, including three significant categories: people who will falsely come in the name of Jesus (Luke 21:8); there will be wars, insurrections (Luke 21:9-10); and the earth will experience earthquakes, famines, and plagues (Luke 21:11). If disciples are too preoccupied then they will miss these signs and not be prepared.

6. *Which of these signs have you witnessed in your lifetime?*
7. *Have you ever seen signs and wondered if the end of time was drawing near?*

Before the end of time occurs, Jesus warns his disciples about their personal struggles. Followers of Jesus will be arrested, persecuted, imprisoned, and hated. Some of the people hating his followers will be their own family members and friends. Those attacked will be given the opportunity to testify, but not to worry. Jesus personally will prepare the words for each person to speak. Jesus is quite serious about his warnings. He does not want followers to be caught off guard and ill-prepared.

8. *What might have been the response of the listeners?*
9. *What is the message for us today?*

word among us

When Hurricane Katrina was heading to the Gulf Coast area in 2005, warnings were issued widely and strongly. Evacuate! Meteorologists were able to track the hurricane and issue clear statements of warning. Fortunately, over a million people safely evacuated their homes and were able to get out of harm's way. Others decided to stay to be with loved ones in the hospital or with their pets. Others chose to ignore the warnings.

1. *Have you ever experienced warnings to leave a dangerous area?*
2. *Did you leave? Describe the situation.*

The winds of Hurricane Katrina eventually became still. People relaxed and believed they had survived the worst. That's when the levees broke open. There was no warning. The water came pouring into vulnerable neighborhoods, forcing people to climb to their attics and rooftops for protection. The hurricane had wiped out much of the communication system in the area, so it was nearly impossible to communicate the severity of the situation. People had prepared for a hurricane, but not the breach in the levees. In some areas the water stayed weeks, turning neighborhoods into lakes. Very slowly, the water receded, leaving unspeakable devastation.

3. *How do you prepare for that which is unexpected?*
4. *After disaster, how does the Christian respond?*

Jesus is quite concerned about disciples being prepared and paying attention to the signs before the end of time. He knows it is easy to become complacent and comfortable with life. At some point, life as we know it will end. God's judgment will come.

Yet, Jesus spoke these words over 2000 years ago. The end has not come. Wars, earthquakes, and devastation have come and gone.

5. *Are you concerned about the end of time?*
6. *What signs would catch your attention?*
7. *Why would God choose to destroy this earth -- now?*

Before the end of time, it will get rough for those who follow Jesus Christ. Disciples will be arrested, persecuted, and even hated. Instead of approaching this time with fear and trembling, disciples are to understand these events to be opportunities for witnessing about Jesus Christ. It may not feel like an opportunity, but that is how God sees it.

8. *Have you even been persecuted or hated because of your faith in Jesus Christ? Describe that situation.*
9. *How might a person witness to Jesus Christ in times of difficulty?*

Jesus promises to fill his followers with the words and wisdom to speak. Don't worry about what you are to say. Wait upon the Spirit to fill you with the words and wisdom of Jesus.

10. *How does waiting and being prepared fit together?*
11. *What might you do this week to prepare for the end of time?*

Prayer

O God, I confess to you my preoccupation with the things of this world. It is hard to look for signs of your reign and the end of time. Keep me alert to your ways. Amen

Dig Deeper

Malachi 4:1-2a

last word

This week take an inventory of your preparation for the coming of Christ.



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November 23, 2025
Who is Jesus?

Jeremiah's promise of the execution of "justice and righteousness in the land" finds ironic fulfillment in the execution of Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews. It appears utterly contradictory that a king should be crucified with a criminal. This victory appears for all the world as a humiliating defeat. Yet through the gate of death, Jesus opens the door to paradise.

Worshippers on Christ the King Sunday will experience a profound juxtaposition between hymns that extol the glories of Christ triumphant and Luke's gospel that tells the story of Jesus' excruciating crucifixion. If we want to fully understand the cosmic Christ, if we want to truly enter into this Christ the King Sunday, we have to be willing to embrace not just the light and glory of Christ; we must also face and embrace the profound suffering and injustice done to God, the earth, and ourselves. "Jesus, remember me" (Luke 23:42), says the criminal hanging beside him just before the sun's light fails. In that liminal and suffering space, Christ is revealed as King.

Opening Prayer: O God, our true life, to serve you is freedom, and to know you is unending joy. We worship you, we glorify you, we give thanks to you for your great glory. Abide with us, reign in us, and make this world into a fit habitation for your divine majesty, through Jesus Christ our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen

Sermon Reflection:

As you reflect on the sermon, what stands out as being particularly helpful, insightful, or difficult to grasp?

Colossians 1:11-20 Hymn to Christ, firstborn of all creation; peace through his blood. An early Christian hymn praises the mystery of the political, personal, and mystical Christ, the one who was present at creation and is eternally reigning with God.

Gospel Reading: Luke 23:33-43 Jesus is crucified between two thieves: you will be with me in Paradise.

Amid scoffing and slander from those who sarcastically call him Messiah and King, Jesus reveals that to be Messiah and King is to give one's life for others. Here he uses his power to welcome a despised criminal to paradise but puts his own death into God's hands.

Notes:

Daily Discipleship

Christ the King Sunday (C) – Luke 23:33-43

Discipleship: *A New Kind of Leader*

Focus Question: *How does your leadership style reflect your faith in Jesus Christ?*

word of life

“There was also an inscription over him, ‘This is the King of the Jews.’” Luke 23:38 (NRSV)

Read Luke 23:33-43

The liturgical church year concludes with Christ the King Sunday and this reading of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. He is a new kind of leader. How else do you explain a ruler who willingly goes to his death on behalf of his people? He was crucified with criminals while people watched and the leaders scoffed.

1. *Describe an ideal ruler.*
2. *How are rulers typically protected from harm?*

People yelled, “He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!” (Luke 23:35 NRSV) The soldiers mocked him with sour wine and challenged him, “If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!” (Luke 23:37 NRSV)

3. *Why didn't Jesus verbally respond to them?*
4. *How might an earthly ruler try to save himself?*

A sign was placed over his head with the words, “This is the King of the Jews.” (Luke 23:38) The sign left nothing to the imagination, but made a clear statement about the identity of Jesus. But Jesus was not living up to the expectations of a king. So, the words written as mockery, in reality revealed the truth of the situation. Jesus died as a servant-leader who had a greater vision of salvation than just saving himself on the cross. He embodied the description of God's servant articulated in Isaiah 42.

Hanging beside Jesus were criminals condemned to die. One joined the crowd in mocking Jesus. He wanted Jesus to save the whole group. Why not? The other criminal was offended by his remarks. He understood the criminals deserved their punishment, but he believed Jesus was an innocent man. This conversation with the criminals is unique to the Gospel of Luke.

The second criminal did not ask to be rescued from his death sentence. He knew he got what he deserved, but he asked simply to be remembered. He believed Jesus was a king who was going to his kingdom. Despite Jesus facing his own death, Jesus took seriously the request by the second criminal and responded with powerful words, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.” (Luke 23:43 NRSV)

5. *Describe each of the criminals.*
6. *What does it mean to be “remembered”?*
7. *What does this conversation with the criminal tell you about Jesus as king?*
8. *What is being promised to the criminal?*

Sometimes being a ruler is acting in a new way despite the crowd's call for more familiar behavior. Jesus models a different kind of leadership, proving a ruler is not about ordering people to follow commands or executing power.

9. *What does it mean to be a servant-leader?*

word among us

A new boy moved into the neighborhood and began attending a nearby elementary school. He was big and strong for his age. At first glance he was quite intimidating. The bully of the school took an immediate disliking to him and was ready to fight him the first day, but the new boy refused to fight. Instead, he used his delightful sense of humor to flavor all situations. He made friends easily, cooperated with the teachers, and was a natural leader. This just made the bully more determined to bring the new boy down and ruin him.

1. *What is a possible ending to the story?*
2. *What made the new boy less intimidating?*

Leaders come in all ages, shapes, and sizes. But for all, Jesus demonstrates a new kind of leadership. He is often described as a servant-leader.

3. *What can you learn about leadership from Jesus?*
4. *How can a person be a servant and a leader?*
5. *How would you describe your leadership style?*

Jesus was a leader who entered the waters of the Jordan River and was baptized with sinners. He called sinners to follow him, demonstrating patience as he tried to teach his ways to them. He wept with them and dined with them. By enduring mockery, pain, and death itself, Jesus lived through the worst. He completed the mission of God by dying on the cross and being raised from death.

6. *As you consider Jesus as a ruler, what impresses you about his approach to leadership?*
7. *What advice would Jesus give to future leaders in the church?*

As much as Jesus interacted with people, he walked the path to his death alone. No one else could take his place or do it for him. Those who chose to mock him could not see the bigger picture and the new kind of leadership he demonstrated. But their lack of understanding did not deter Jesus. It was never about people having complete understanding of the ways of God. It was and is about God acting in a particular way toward humanity through Jesus Christ.

8. *What if Jesus would have come down off the cross?*
9. *What if Jesus came only in power to command humanity into faith?*
10. *Would you follow that kind of leader?*

Discipleship means being a student of someone's teaching. Christian disciples choose to follow Jesus Christ. By enduring mockery, pain, and death itself, Jesus lived through the worst. We are to try to emulate Jesus in our lives, particularly when we are in leadership roles, be it parenting, work, or volunteering. But it is not easy to be a servant-leader. Daily we can call on the Holy Spirit to guide us into the ways of discipleship, allowing Jesus to lead our lives and rule over us.

11. *What does it mean for Jesus Christ to rule your life?*
12. *What do you hope to remember from this lesson?*

Prayer

Christ, lead our lives and rule over us. Amen.

Dig Deeper

Isaiah 42

last word

Find or create a small cross
to carry with you
each day of the week.



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