

IN-KY Synod Sermon
Christ the King Sunday
11.20.2022
Pastor Nancy Nyland, Director for Evangelical Mission

Gospel Reading Luke 23:33-43
The Holy Gospel according to St. Luke the 23rd chapter
Glory to you, O Lord.

³³When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left.³⁴Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." And they cast lots to divide his clothing. ³⁵And the people stood by, watching; but the leaders scoffed at him, saying, "He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!"³⁶The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine,³⁷and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!" ³⁸There was also an inscription over him, "This is the King of the Jews." ³⁹One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, "Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!" ⁴⁰But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?" ⁴¹And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong." ⁴²Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." ⁴³He replied, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

The Gospel of the Lord
Praise to you, O Christ.

Grace to you and peace from God, the Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit.
The Gospel reading I just read is for Christ the King Sunday, this coming Sunday, the last Sunday of the church year.

The Sunday following, we will begin the a new church year with the season of Advent. But before we begin a new church year with all our preparations and hopes and expectations of Jesus coming into the world, first we must end this church year. We do so by paying attention to the way Jesus fulfills his ministry on earth as Christ the King.

This Gospel reading from Luke certainly does not depict Jesus as an earthly king. Rather than hearing about the reign of Christ in the new heaven and the new earth, we hear about Jesus' crucifixion. Crucified, hanging on the cross, between two criminals one on his right and one on his left.

Jesus does not sit upon a throne; his throne instead is a cross — a criminal's execution apparatus. Jesus is wearing not a golden crown, but a crown of thorns. People scoff at him, mock him, badger him, hurl insults and play a kind of truth or dare.

The leaders scoff -- "He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!" The soldiers mock -- "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!" The criminal derides -- "Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!"

Christ is King indeed. But the question is — what kind of king is Jesus? And maybe a more important question is: What kind of king do we want Jesus or need Jesus to be in our lives?

Do we want a king who dictates every moment, every movement, every aspect of our lives, so we don't get to or have to think for ourselves?

Do we want a king who swoops in and overcomes our opponents with amazing superpower, so we don't have to face our own struggles, so we don't have to step up and fight our own battles, so we don't have to be reconciled to our enemies?

Do we want the kind of king who parades around with majesty and self-deceit, so we can keep our distance, admiring from afar, so we don't have to get too close or be too vulnerable?

Jesus is not that kind of king. Jesus is a king of weakness and vulnerability. Jesus is a king of peacemaking and forgiveness and reconciliation. Jesus is a king of vines attached to branches, chosen friends, and abiding love. Jesus is a king who claims and names in the washing of rebirth. Jesus is a king who leaves the 99 to seek the lost one, welcomes a prodigal child, provides light to the world, and sight to the blind.

This is the kind of king who we need in the world we live in. This is the kind of king who we need as we navigate the hills, valleys, curves, and level plains of our lives. This is the only kind of king who can offer us sinful human beings the forgiveness, redemption, and salvation we need. The kind of king who brings wholeness when lives and relationships and systems are so fragmented.

Jesus — Christ the king, is the resurrection and the life, the one who loves us so much, he hung on the cross, endured excruciating pain, while insults and mockery were hurled at him. Jesus died for our sake, gave his life so that we could have life.

Jesus is the kind of King, we hear about in the accompanying scripture for this day from Colossians 1. The kind of King who *"is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross."* (Colossians 1:15-20)

On Christ the King Sunday, we worship and praise and celebrate this Jesus, this Son of God, who hung on the cross and died for us. The king, our Savior, the Savior of the world, who didn't use his power to save himself, but remained on the cross, giving himself for others, suffering, dying for us and for our salvation.

Jesus, the one who forgave sins, looking out over the very people who literally and figuratively hung him on the cross and said, "Father forgive them for they know not what they do."

Jesus, the one who forgave the thief hanging next to him on the cross and promising him, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

That forgiveness.....is for each of you, as well.....that promise to be with Jesus in paradise today is also for you.....for each one of you.

Jesus remember me when you come into your kingdom.

Today....right now....Jesus does remember you. Jesus brings us to the place of paradise, for God's kingdom breaks in upon us right here, right now.

As more words from Colossians say: May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light. God has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Christ the King! Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

United with your saints across time and place, we pray for our shared world.

A brief silence.

We pray for your church. Embolden denominations and faith-based organizations in creative and collaborative ministries and increase our work for the sake of the gospel. Lord, in your mercy,

receive our prayer.

We pray for the earth. Protect waterways from pollution and animal habitats from destruction. Guide us in careful stewardship of waters, plant life, and animals. Lord, in your mercy,

receive our prayer.

We pray for the nations of the world. Instill in every leader's heart a desire for justice and peace. Support the work of international collaborations that seek the goals of health and joy for all people. Lord, in your mercy,

receive our prayer.

We pray for all who suffer in body, mind, or spirit. Be present with those who are lonely or afraid. Comfort all who are sick, battling diseases, recovering, or anticipating surgery (especially those who we name in our hearts or out loud). Lord, in your mercy,

receive our prayer.

We pray for the congregations in the IK Synod. Guide our pastors, deacons and council members in discernment, and nurture new leaders with fresh ideas. Give all congregations a spirit of discipleship and service. Lord, in your mercy,

receive our prayer.

We give thanks for all who have died in the faith (especially). Console us who mourn and comfort us with the beautiful promise of life in your kingdom. Lord, in your mercy,

receive our prayer.

Accept these prayers, gracious God, and those known only to you, through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Amen.

Hear us now Father, as we pray the words that Christ has taught us,

Our Father, who art in heaven,

hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come,

thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread;

and forgive us our trespasses,

as we forgive those who trespass against us;

and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory,

forever and ever. Amen.

Blessing

God, who gives life to all things

and frees us from despair,

bless you with truth and peace.

And may the holy Trinity, ☩ one God,

guide you always in faith, hope, and love.

Amen.

Dismissal

Go in peace, with Christ beside you.

Thanks be to God.

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