

**November 20, 2022 Rev. Katheryn McGinnis**

Let us pray. Savior God, guide us into and through your Word, that we might be shaped by your Spirit's message to us today and transformed for service in your world. Amen.

Our scripture for today comes from the gospel of Luke, chapter 23, verses 33 through 43. Listen now for the word of the lord.

<sup>33</sup> When 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. <sup>34</sup> Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." And they cast lots to divide his clothing. <sup>35</sup> And 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!" <sup>36</sup> The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine <sup>37</sup> and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!" <sup>38</sup> There was also an inscription over him, "This is the King of the Jews. <sup>39</sup> One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, "Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!" <sup>40</sup> But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? <sup>41</sup> And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong." <sup>42</sup> Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come in your kingdom." <sup>43</sup> He replied, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise."

The word of the lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Today, Christ the King Sunday, marks the end of our liturgical year. The church has its own calendar. The beginning of the Christian year is Advent, and the end of the year is Christ the King Sunday.

I didn't pay much attention to the liturgical year until I was in seminary. I knew the different seasons of the church, but I didn't know of the structure of how they come together in the cycle of a year.

And then, once I had learned about it, I didn't really come to truly appreciate the liturgical year until I started preaching each week.

In preaching and leading worship week after week, I have come to find deep meaning and comfort in how the year is structured and how we move throughout the various seasons.

The beginning of the year is Advent, when we wait with joy for the birth of our savior. We take time to anticipate his arrival and have hope in the light he brings to the world.

Then comes Christmas, where we celebrate our Lord's birth.

Then epiphany celebrates God's manifestation, or self-revelation, to the world in Jesus Christ.

Next comes a short period of ordinary time. Time to reflect and get into the rhythm of daily life and how that manifestation is part of lives.

And then comes the 40 days of Lent. A time to prepare, to repent, to reflect, in our various ways to behold the mystery of resurrection.

And after we have prepared, faced our betrayal on Maundy Thursday, mourned his violent death on good Friday, and remained silent on Holy Saturday, Easter comes.

And in the Easter season, we celebrate resurrection – triumph over death that is the foundation of our faith and the church, and challenge ourselves to uncover the mystery of resurrection – and how resurrection can change our lives.

And after we are given resurrection, then the holy spirit descends upon us and Pentecost births our church.

And after the church is born, we get months of ordinary time. From Pentecost all the way until advent, to discern and learn what it means to be the church.

During that time our lectionary focuses on the day-to-day life of Jesus as a practical guide of how to live our lives. And it all culminates today, Christ the King Sunday.

A day where the church gives thanks and praise for sovereignty of Christ, who is Lord of all creation and is coming again in glory to reign.

I think people can often be a little uneasy about Christ the King Sunday.

I don't remember celebrating Christ the King Sunday growing up. Again, just like the church year, I had not heard of it until Seminary.

I think we're a bit uneasy about it because when we think of King, a long and often dark and oppressive and violent history comes to mind.

Kings, and the power they had, often, did not use that power for good. Instead, they reveled in their power and wanted more and more no matter the cost, conquering nations and exploiting people to serve them.

And perhaps we don't have many kings these days, but certainly in our world we have leaders who abuse their power and do the very same.

So why would we want to associate Christ our King among them? Where does Christ our King fit in their midst?

Well, he doesn't. Instead, he overturns them, just as Luke has taught us these many months in ordinary time – Christ has come to turn the world upside down. Specifically to overturn empires and regimes ruled by a King and leaders that abuse their power so that the lowest they suppressed are lifted highest in God's eyes.

The marginalized they push out are the ones God invites in. It is important to face and claim the reign of Christ because his reign is not of this world. His kingdom is not of this world. His glory is unlike anything we have ever known... and Luke shows us that in crucifixion.

Christ's glory is the cross, his reign begun in his suffering and death. In a world of power, Christ rejects it.

It's radical and ridiculous to think a king's glory is in his death. Don't let the familiarity of Christ's crucifixion distract you from its radicalness.

Crucifixion was well known during Jesus' time. It was used as a means of state sanctioned capital punishment in Rome and other parts of the world.

In Rome, crucifixion was only perpetuated on people of the lower classes and not those were not roman citizens. People of the higher classes were not treated as severely and certainly not crucified.

It's worth taking a vulnerable, honest moment, to acknowledge that often our justice system is not all that different. We don't crucify – but poor people and minorities are given harsher sentences than people with wealth and social influence. The system is rigged against people without means or status.

Crucifixion was meant to humiliate, to dehumanize those who were hung upon it. The soldiers cast lots to divide his clothing because his clothes were more important than his life.

When the soldiers mock him it is because it is absurd to think that anyone who was a king would end up nailed to a cross, slowly dying a painful death, his humanity stripped from him.

And yet... this, of all places, this violent state sanctioned execution - is the place where Christ's reign is manifested in our world.

And the only one who sees that is a convicted criminal hanging there with him. There were two convicted criminals crucified with Jesus that day. One continues to mock him like the guards and those in the crowd.

The other, calls Jesus by his name, declares him innocent, and asks Jesus just to remember him when in Christ's kingdom. He doesn't ask for forgiveness or salvation. He just wants to be remembered in Christ's goodness. And in response Christ declares he will be with him in paradise.

I think it's important to note a few things here. First, we don't know what happened to the first criminal. Certainly Christ could have declared the same to the first criminal, we don't know.

And second – circumstances change in an instant. We don't know the lives of these two criminals, we don't know what got them there. Because they were crucified, we do know they were likely poor and of low standing. But one bad decision, just once of being in the wrong place in the wrong time and our own world could crumble and we could find ourselves convicted on the cross.

But this second criminal, when he speaks Jesus' name and acknowledges his kingdom, this dying criminal has seen something, recognized something in this moment that others will come to understand only by being taught by the risen Christ.

As Patrick Wilson explains, "Jesus' disciples have the same advantage we are given in worship when we hear the voice of Christ interpreting the Scriptures, but the dying criminal lacks this benefit. All he can know is the brutal gore and stench of crucifixion."

So which criminal are we, the one who joins in on the mocking, thinking, perhaps justly, that a true king wouldn't die on a cross? Or are we the criminal who encounters Jesus only in violent darkness? Yet it is there that he knows Christ by name and asks only to be remembered.

We're probably both as we go through the difficult journey that is our lives. And yet – that is the very challenge of ordinary time. To discern where Christ is within the complexities of humanity. Jesus declares "truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise".

The today he speaks of is the moment when salvation breaks through. Any moment could be "the today" with Jesus in paradise.

Because what is paradise but Christ himself – to walk his ways and to bring the kingdom of God here on earth. This is given to us now.

The quote that I shared with you for our preparation for worship – from Howard Hageman – is about the criminal who calls Jesus by his name.

I'll share the whole quote with you now: "His tragedy is that his introduction to paradise came so late... and his glory is that he found him in time. His tragedy and his glory are not unlike yours and mine. And Good Friday is the opportunity to redeem tragedy into glory. For what is our tragedy but our failure to grasp what Christ can do for our lives here and now? And what is our glory but to discover with him how to live in heaven even while we live on earth?"

As we leave ordinary time and the year ends, and enter advent and a new year begins, Christ the King is the transition we need.

As we discern how to be the church in our everyday lives, and bring God's kingdom here on Earth, we have the hope that Advent brings because of Christ our King.

Christ our King demands we face earthly kings, corrupt leaders, and the systems they create that oppress and marginalize – and in his example – work to overturn them.

It's there that we discover how to live in heaven even while we live on earth.

How to make this day today in paradise.

How to be like the criminal and truly see the glory of crucified king

And for that, Thanks be to God.