

SECOND READING: Luke 23:33-43

33 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. 34 Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." And they cast lots to divide his clothing. 35 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!" 36 The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine, 37 and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!" 38 There was also an inscription over him, "This is the King of the Jews."

39 One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, "Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!" 40 But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? 41 And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong." 42 Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." 43 He replied, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise. This is word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Jeremiah 23:1-6

Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! says the Lord. 2 Therefore thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, concerning the shepherds who shepherd my people: It is you who have scattered my flock, and have driven them away, and you have not attended to them. So I will attend to you for your evil doings, says the Lord. 3 Then I myself will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the lands where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply. 4 I will raise up shepherds over them who will shepherd them, and they shall not fear any longer, or be dismayed, nor shall any be missing, says the Lord.

5 The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. 6 In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. And this is the name by which he will be called: "The Lord is our righteousness."

This is word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

“Christ is King”

Today, in addition to being the Sunday right after Thanksgiving, is also Reign of Christ Sunday, previously called Christ the King Sunday. This day is intended to be the that day Christians around the world make special celebration of Jesus being our Lord and King! WE come before his throne, humbly offering our complete praise and adulation. And this is well and good, except that the lectionary text for today describes Jesus’ crucifixion, and it does not seem to be the proper choice for Reign of Christ Sunday, does it? In it, we are given anything but the image of a high, magnificent, glorious & powerful king, above whom there is no other.

No, we are given an image that makes our minds and hearts ache. We wince as we see Jesus there, so deeply humiliated on a Roman cross, bleeding and half-naked, dying like an outcast, like one of the lowly persons he often kept company with...no, even worse, like a criminal among criminals, receiving derisive attacks from first the leaders, then from the soldiers and even from one of the criminals. *“Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!”* There Jesus is, with symbols of royal power surrounding him, but each meant to mock the idea that he has any power at all.... a sarcastic title above his head, a crown...of thorns...on his head, and a royal court who offers him vinegar and gamble for his royal robe.¹

No, this is not the kind of king that any of us want to accept, hanging on a shameful piece of wood, a crucified king, with a handful of weeping women and frightened and confused men standing helplessly at a distance. The Anointed One, the Messiah, the King we expect to have been a person of domination, of strength, of might, of power not shame! Even with all that we (you and I) know, we read this passage, we see this scene and, because we are conditioned by our world of “might makes right” and “glamour means success”, we think: *“Couldn’t Jesus have at least retaliated against the Romans, even a little bit? Couldn’t he have followed the rules and helped himself? Couldn’t he have done something to save himself and survive?”*

But then.... we (you and I)....remind ourselves of what we also know. JESUS NEVER PLAYED BY THE RULES. He ate with sinners, welcomed the outcast and marginalized,

¹Kristin Adkins Whitesides. *“A Sermon for Every Sunday: When You Can’t Do It Yourself”*. <https://asermonforeverysunday.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Kristin-Whitesides-Reign-of-Christ.pdf> (accessed 11/21/19).

touched the untouchable, forgave enemies, elevated the status of women and children. He taught that the last shall be first and that the poor shall be raised up. He stood with solidarity with the suffering, and in doing so, disrupted and threatened the political and religious forces in the Empire. Even the scene in the lectionary paints this picture. While Jesus was hanging there looking out over ALL of them and “*feeling the full horror of the human condition, helpless before its own apparatus of violence,*” as Catherine Keller states,² he made the supreme offer of love. He asked for mercy on their behalf! And indeed, in his conversation with the penitent CRIMINAL, he said, “*Today, you will be with me in Paradise.*” What love.

No, Jesus never played by the rules. It was never his intent to do so. It was not his intent to save himself for he took on our lowly flesh to give himself on our behalf, no matter who we are, no matter where we are, or what we’ve done. Theologian John Caputo said, “*The perverse core of the cross lies in being a weak force. It is a FORCE that is brought to its fullest realization, to its perfection and strength, by virtue of Christ’s willing participation with his fellows in the flesh, in fact with the weakest of his fellows in the flesh ... the suffering, poor, the misunderstood, the marginalized....ultimately the criminals.*”³

And so, friends, when we remind ourselves of these things, we see that this passage is ACTUALLY THE PERFECT PASSAGE FOR REIGN OF CHRIST SUNDAY BECAUSE IT AFFIRMS THE TRUTH THAT THIS IS OUR KING! Christ is our King who is above all kings and has more power than all others....more power than all others. His IS of course a different of power, a redefined power. Our king’s power, is not one who dominates, as the world knows dominance, but it is one whose ultimate power lies in its contagious influence on his believers to respond...in its contagious influence on his followers, you and I, to do likewise, to love others with the abandon with which he has loved us.

When one considers all of the dictators and oppressive leaders over the centuries who have forced people to follow them with a stranglehold around their necks, their power and their

² Catherine Keller. *On the Mystery* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 86.

³ John D. Caputo *The Weakness of God: A Theology of the Event* (Bloomington, Indiana: University Press, 2006).43. Quoted in Catherine Keller. *On the Mystery* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008),84. 06), 43.

kingdoms have come and gone. But the humble sacrificial love of Jesus has resulted in the empowerment of a movement of followers over the centuries numbering in the billions and billions, all who have lived and died and continue to live and die to transform the world from within, to bring his Kingdom to earth and to bring others to know him. This is the definition of real power... not a power over...but an empowerment.

Friends, we are empowered to transform the world from within...by entering into places, into circumstances whether it be waiting with someone in the ER, standing with them at the cemetery, visiting them in jail or finding shelter for them if they are without, sharing a meal if they are alone, spending some time listening if they need to talk, or maybe just acknowledging them when others refuse. We are empowered to do as Jesus did, as the now famous statue of homeless Jesus portrays (Timothy Schmaltz), to speak for them, to act for them, to stand in for them. And in the same way, we are also empowered to tell others, who might want to assign triumphalist qualities to him, that he is instead a king whose power was made perfect in weakness, and who continues to freely give his presence and his love to us with a passion that cannot be killed, a love that is stronger than death.

St. Francis of Assisi had long experienced extreme revulsion every time he saw someone suffering from leprosy, for he could not stand to see their disfigured bodies, missing fingers, toes, noses, infected limbs. But Francis knew he was called to push against the response that he had, and one day he was moved to approach and embrace a man with leprosy and show him sincere affection. It was then that Francis experienced the empowerment of Spirit of Christ, an intense conversion that altered the course of his life. He began to work with those who had leprosy in a leprosarium in which he could daily show tenderness, meet their needs, and dress their wounds. Not only did they benefit, but in serving them, Francis himself came to find true peace and joy. Others who witnessed his work came to do the same.⁴

So, on this day, brothers and sisters, this Sunday just following our celebration of Thanksgiving, we can read Luke 23 and remember that of our many blessings, we have this

⁴D. Rebecca Hansen. "Christus Rex, Christ the King Sunday (A) – November 26, 2023" D. Rebecca Hansen
<https://www.episcopalchurch.org/sermon/christus-rex-christ-the-king-sunday-a-november-26-2023/>. (accessed 11-26-23).

kind of King... a king who has stood the meaning of kingship on its head, and we can remember the privilege we've been given, to go forth and transform the world from within. May all praise and glory, and laud and honor be his. For he, the King of Glory, reigns on high forever and ever. Amen.

Let us stand and worship the Christ, singing the response to the word, "Crown him with many crowns"