

Luke 23:27-43

Christ the king is the theme before us today, the Last Sunday of the Church Year. Jesus doesn't look much like a king as He hangs from a bloody cross in our Gospel text. But our collect puts it beautifully, "*Lord Jesus Christ, You reign among us by the preaching of Your cross.*"

We're not much familiar with kings. We didn't like our last one, King George of England, so we began a revolution. We are familiar with presidents, but somehow it wouldn't sound right to refer to Him as President Jesus. He is king Jesus. And presidents they impeach, or try to; kings they crucify.

So Jesus is a king. But whose king? There is an inscription over His head, "This is the king of the Jews." Pilate put it there. Yet Pilate hardly thought of Jesus as his king. He is king of the Jews, it reads. But even the Jews don't want Jesus as their king. "*We have no king but Caesar!*" they cried. There are two criminals being crucified next to Jesus. What about them, is He their king? But where's the honor in that? And besides, the one criminal mocks Jesus. He hardly sees Him as his king.

But the other criminal...he sings a different melody. In fact, this one actually hails Jesus as king. "*When You come into Your kingdom,*" he says to Him. A king has to have a kingdom. Otherwise he isn't a king. King of what, if he has no kingdom?

So where is Jesus' kingdom? He never owned any property. Even His tomb was loaned to Him. He had no soldiers, no army. If He had, they would be fighting for Him. He did have a crown, but it was of thorns. Jesus' kingdom is unlike all the other kingdoms of the world. He reigns as king where His Gospel, the preaching of the cross, is received by faith.

And this criminal is one such as these. Now at first he wanted no part of Jesus. We're told that he chimed in with the others in mocking Him. But the Holy Spirit worked in this man's heart. As Jesus spoke, "*Father, forgive them...*" this criminal began to see things differently. By God's grace, and work of love in him, he applied Jesus' words to himself. Jesus is not just a king, this man came to believe, He is my king...my forgiving king. And we see him turning to Jesus asking for a place with Him. "*Jesus, remember me when You come into Your kingdom.*"

This is a very bold thing to ask. This man had nothing to offer Jesus. He was a thief, a robber. He had nothing in his past but a life of wickedness. If he lived in our day, he would be in the news constantly as a carjacker, a home invader, and worse. No, this man was wretched, a poor, miserable, sinner. But this is who Jesus calls into His kingdom. He is the friend of sinners, and He wants to be king of those who have nothing and are nothing.

And so what about us? Is Jesus your king? Is He mine? If He is, we must place ourselves with this criminal. But that is not an easy thing to do. For we do have things in our life we are proud of. We do think of ourselves as having something to offer Jesus.

No friends. "Nothing in my hands I bring, simply to Thy cross I cling." Pilate, the chief priests and elders of the Jews all refused Jesus as their king for they all refused to see themselves as nothing and having nothing. Now Caesar may live in a grand palace for them, but if we want

Jesus to be our king, we must look to the bloody figure on the cross, for this truly is His throne. And by the preaching of His cross He reigns as our king.

But if He is my king, why do I so often live as if He was not? I rebel against Him daily. And when a king speaks, are not his subjects to listen to what he says? But so often I turn away from what Jesus says. I don't listen very well. And are you not like me in all this? We say Jesus is our king, but then we go out and crown ourselves king.

But listen my friends, this is important...Jesus is your king not because you act like He is, but because He does. Jesus is your king not because you claim Him, but because He claims you. He does, you know. He claims you in your baptism, and your baptism remains forever.

And though we do not listen to Him very well, His Father in heaven does. "*Father, forgive them,*" Jesus prayed. And God the Father listened. He does forgive. He forgives you. Jesus' kingdom is one of grace. Yes, He wants us to live rightly, and as His subjects, we want to. But when we fail, He never becomes angry at you. He always forgives you.

That criminal failed his entire life. And yet Jesus told him, "*Today you shall be with Me in Paradise.*" And so he is. That thief and robber is in heaven right now. When we gather at the altar for the Holy Communion, that criminal is there with us, for he is always with Jesus. Let this comfort you and be assurance for you. The same promise of Paradise Jesus gave that criminal, He gives to you in your baptism. And no one can take it from you.

This is the last sermon you will hear this year. Next Sunday the new Church Year begins. The message you hear today is the last one that criminal heard before he died. And hearing it, he believed it. Be like him in this. The preaching of the cross is for everyone. And it's also for you. And believing it, you, too, will be with Jesus forever. Amen.