

Luke 23 : 33-43—Feast of Christ the King

Prayer: We praise you Lord Jesus Christ for your reign which welcomes and saves all people may we stand firm under your authority as your servants. Amen.

This is the last Sunday of the Christian calendar. As usual before we begin the next cycle of seasons beginning with Advent, is a vision of God's glorious future, we end the year by remembering the sovereignty of the one who makes the future possible, the one under whose authority we stand; Jesus Christ, God's righteous monarchy.

But, the reign of Christ must never be viewed through the lens of human empires. The throne of Christ is unlike that of any human ruler, and the values of Christ's reign are completely different from those of human societies.

It raises the fundamental questions for us. The first is whether we will really place our lives under the authority of Jesus. It is easy to call Jesus Lord, but to really live as a disciple means our lives must reflect the same values, attitudes and behaviours as Jesus did. Only then are we really living with Christ as our authority. The second question is to understand what Christ's authority looks like. Unlike our world, where authority means dominance/greater control over others, the authority of Jesus is about serving others, collaborating with others and setting others free. This week we end the year by placing our lives firmly under the authority of Jesus once again.

What kind of King with all the power in the world allows himself to be crucified and killed in the most shameful way imaginable? OUR KING, THE KING OF ALL CREATION, who is the very Son of God, the one who can melt the earth away with one word, who can still the storm. This is the King we give homage and thanks for today, the kind of King who willingly dies for his people.

Luke's version is an intriguing contrast in the way different people respond to Jesus' death. Jesus is an unlikely King who rules from an unlikely throne. If we want to know what kind of King Jesus is or what kind of King we have, we just need to look at the cross. On the cross, in his suffering and death we see a King who allows himself to be humiliated, mocked by criminals, women, religious leaders, soldiers who view his death as a curse. And then the very same people are recognising God's hand in Jesus' death and turn to Jesus for hope and salvation even as he dies. We see this in the repentant thief, and Jesus refuses to save himself. WHY? Because of his overflowing love for us and because he is dying to save you and me. Jesus gets what he does not deserve—death on a cross; so that we can get what WE DO NOT DESERVE—life in God's kingdom. An unlikely King with an unlikely throne showing us in the most amazing way of God's unselfish love for you and me.

THIS IS WHAT THE KIND OF KING JESUS IS.

It is strange to focus on the cross when speaking of the REIGN OF CHRIST—it is the way Gospels do it. The way that God's reign is revealed in the world, even as they were mocking him. Jesus's detractors were right when they called him KING. But, the cross reveals that God's reign is very different from human power games, instead of rebuking the repentant criminal because of his past; Jesus welcomes him. And instead of anger at his own suffering Jesus dies with dignity, humility, grace and love even towards his enemies.

Ultimately we must choose which realms we will live in – GOD'S REIGN OR THE EMPIRES OF HUMANITY. Which realm do you choose?

It is easy to use mockery, cynicism to protect ourselves from the influence of God's reign and many people do. But, if we want to live as true citizens of God's reign, we will need to appreciate and value the alternative way of living that Jesus teaches. Appreciation best expressed in praise like the penitent thief. Today constantly submit yourself to Christ's reign through the practice of praise.

Jesus remember me when you come into your kingdom. We know that 2 thieves were on crosses on either side of Jesus for crimes they committed. One mocks Jesus but the other reaches out with a prayer and statement of faith in all scripture, without any hope of being rescued from his death. As Jesus himself is dying he offers a hopeful and powerful promise in scripture. *Truly I tell you today you will be with me in paradise.* Jesus is a king who is always ready to forgive and ready to welcome the repentant sinner home. It is never too late to turn to this king and be welcomed into his kingdom. The one who created our world, the one whom all things hold together, the one who rescued us from darkness by dying for our sins, is so filled with love for you and me that he is always ready to promise us paradise with him. This is our King and there is no better king to worship today.

So, what kind of subjects are we expected to be? How are we to live in this kingdom as subjects of our Christ the King? Visualize yourself as the thief on the cross next to Jesus.....we are all sinners. Summon courage and say, "*Jesus remember me when you come into your kingdom.*" And Jesus responds, "**Go and remember what I have done.** What would you do, what would you change, what would remain the same if you are let off the cross? That's what it means to live as subjects of CHRIST THE KING. You and I have been let off the cross and given a chance to live each day for the King who died for us. What does it mean for you?

This week we end the year by placing our lives firmly under the authority of Jesus once again. We pledge allegiance to Christ the King. Jesus should reign in our minds, our hearts and our bodies, we cannot serve both God and man.

Today we give thanks for our King. A King who is all powerful, but chooses to reign with love, who chose to be crucified to rescue you, me and the world. He died so that we might live for him. We have been let off the cross that we deserve. Now we have the opportunity to live each day for the King who died to save us, and to do this until that blessed day when his glorious kingdom comes in all its fullness. Come Lord come and be our King. This is the word for our King. Amen.