

Sermon: Moncton, Saint John

November 24, 2019

Readings: [Jeremiah 23:1-6](#) • [Luke 1:68-79](#) • [Colossians 1:11-20](#) • [Luke 23:33-43](#)

Title: Kingship Redefined

[Luke 23:33-43 NRSV](#)

Today is the last Sunday of the Christian calendar—a mere month from Christmas. Next week we enter the season known as Advent—a time of expectant waiting and preparation for both the celebration of the Nativity of Jesus at Christmas and the return of Jesus at the Second Coming.

Today, this last weekend of the Christian calendar is called **Christ the King Sunday**. It is otherwise known as the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe. This is a feast day that was added to the liturgical calendar in 1925 by Pius XI, but has been adopted by the majority of churches, over and above the Roman Catholic one; an example of agreement among the separate denominations.

Pope Pius XI in 1925 established this feast day as an antidote to secularism, a way of life which leaves God out of man's thinking and living and organizes his life as if God did not exist. The feast was intended to proclaim in a striking and effective manner Christ's royalty over individuals, families, society, governments, and nations.

The text for today's sermon is Luke 23, where we find Jesus—**our King**—on a cross. The truth of Jesus being a King was missed by those surrounding the cross. **In fact, if you ask the public today who is Jesus Christ--rarely will you receive an answer that he is a King. Yes—a Saviour to Christians, a Teacher, a good man, the one who started Christianity. But Not a king. The reason is that Jesus in His ministry did not portray himself as the world defined kingship.**

- They look for a king –he came as a lamb.
- They were looking for a warrior—he came as a peacemaker.
- They were looking for a ruler—he came as a servant.
- They were looking for glory—he displayed humility.
- They were looking for status—he spent time with the broken and the poor.
- They were looking for judgment—he came with forgiveness.

- They were looking for liberation from Rome—he submitted to the Roman stake.

Throughout this past year, most of our congregations have gone through Christ’s birth, his life, his teaching, his suffering. We recall the sequence of events leading up to the crucifixion of Jesus, the last supper, his betrayal by Judas in the garden, the kangaroo court before the high priests Annas and Caiaphas, the crowds calling for Pilate to crucify him, the beating, the Roman soldiers rolling the dice for his clothing. These are things are very somber, **but there was one thing during all of this that was right—the message Pilate demanded be posted on the top of the cross in three languages (Hebrew, Latin, Greek):**

“This is the King of the Jews.”

Without knowing it, Pilate told all who were present at the crucifixion that Jesus is the King of the Jews. **He is a king the world does not recognize, and he is a King that takes us to paradise.**

Let’s look a bit closer at this story and see how Jesus redefined the role of a king.

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. Then Jesus said, “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.” And they cast lots to divide his clothing. ([Luke 23:33-34 NRSV](#))

The first way in which Christ redefined the role of a king is that:

A king never forgets his mission

Who was a famous king who forgot his mission?—Solomon. One of the most beautiful prayers uttered by a king.

1 Kings 3:7-9 (NIV)

“Now, O Lord my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David. But I am only a little child and do not know how to carry out my duties. 8 Your servant is here among the people you have chosen, a great people, too numerous to count or number. 9 So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong. For who is able to govern this great people of yours?”

But Solomon forgot his mission—to follow in the footsteps of his father David—to keep the covenant with the one true God and to point the people towards the God of the universe. He is not condemned for his sensuality but for his foreign marriages. This was a good tactic politically but not spiritually. He allowed his foreign wives to engage in different forms of worship of different gods and broke the covenant.

And the tragedy is that he lost sight of his mission in a time of prosperity. Jesus never forgot his message even in a time of suffering and humiliation.

Let's focus on this statement of Jesus, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing."

There is a wonderful lesson here: Even though Jesus had been mocked, spit upon, beaten and nailed to a cross, he still carried out his mission. **His mission was to show the Father's love and to bring forgiveness.** He demonstrated his love for the people so much that even while he was on that cross, he prayed for them. **And he is not just praying for those who put him there—this prayer is for all of humanity. Jesus prayed for all of us because he could see what we would not and could not pray for ourselves.**

Sometimes, forgiveness is difficult to do, isn't it? When a person has hurt you or has done something to you that just pierced your heart, the last thing that you may want to do is pray for them and ask God to forgive them. We believe that they do know or should know what they are doing—in truth they do not.

But, because of Jesus Christ, we can do that. Through the love and forgiveness we have received, we can forgive others, regardless of what they have done to us. **This is the lesson for Christ followers**—and one it seems we desperately need. It's amazing how many who profess to be Christ followers **fill social media with hate about their leaders or former leaders.** We are called to pray for others, to ask God to transform them. **We are not called to join in the mob mentality of sharing disdain.**

Example of Laurens van der Post

Sir Laurens Jan van der Post, CBE (13 December 1906 – 16 December 1996), was a 20th-century South African Afrikaner author, farmer, soldier, political adviser to British heads of government, close friend of Prince Charles, godfather of Prince William, educator, journalist, humanitarian, philosopher, explorer and conservationist.

Laurens Van der Post, *The Night of the New Moon*, 36-7

It was amazing how often and how many of my men would confess to me, after some Japanese excess worse than usual, that for the first time in their lives they had realised the truth, and the dynamic liberating power of the first of the Crucifixion utterances: “Forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

I found that the moment they grasped this fundamental fact of our prison situation, forgiveness became a product not of an act of will or of personal virtue even, but an automatic and all-compelling consequence of a law of understanding: as real and indestructible as Newton’s law of gravity. The tables of the spirit would be strangely and promptly turned and we would find ourselves without self-pity of any kind, feeling deeply sorry as if we were the free men and they the prisoners

This is our King Jesus who never forgot his mission and who prayed for the very ones who were casting lots to divide his clothing—that’s mercy, that’s love.

A second point in Jesus redefining what kingship is all about is found in the next slide.

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!” The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine, and saying, “If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!” There was also an inscription over him, “This is the King of the Jews.” ([Luke 23:35-38 NRSV](#))

A king doesn’t have to prove his identity

If there was ever a king the world did not recognize, it was Jesus. Jesus had not only never committed a crime, he wasn’t convicted of a crime, yet he was killed in a manner used for low-life criminals and enemies of the state. **The sign saying Jesus was “King of the Jews” was meant as a mockery and a justification. They had no other crime to convict him of except potential enemy of the state. Crucifixion was meant to be used as a spectacle to warn others. In this case, it became a sign of hope for all.**

The sign brought a lot of mockery. Leaders were mocking him, the soldiers were mocking him, and even one of the criminals mocked him. Still Jesus didn't respond. **It didn't matter what they thought about him, nothing changed his identity. It didn't matter if they believed him or not, nothing changed who he was.** Most kings rule from a throne and the throne is often the symbol of their power and rulership. **Our King turned his cross into a symbol of hope, peace, joy and love.**

Show the cross—Example above my bed was a cross that lit up in the night.

Jesus didn't have to prove his identity to anyone—he was the Son of God, the Son of Man. **It's a lesson for all of us as Christ followers.** It doesn't matter what scorn people throw at us; it doesn't matter if we are mocked for believing in something (someone) that cannot be seen; it doesn't matter if we are mocked for showing mercy and forgiveness to our enemies; it doesn't matter if we are called out-of-touch with reality, fools, or worse. We know who we are—children of the Father, servants of the true King. **We should not have to use words to claim our identity—our way of living should show that we know who we are.**

One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, “Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!” But the other rebuked him, saying, “Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong.” Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” He replied, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.” ([Luke 23:33-43 NRSV](#))

A king hears the cries of his people

The fact that Jesus and this criminal had this discussion while being nailed to a cross defies logic, yet the Bible shares the exchange with us. One criminal is mocking Jesus, and the other tells him to stop. “This man has done nothing wrong.” **You can't help but wonder if the sign on the cross made the man think.** We don't know, but we do know he turned to Jesus and **addressed him as a king.** “Remember me when you come into your kingdom.”

I see our King doing three things here:

1. *Jesus puts his own needs aside and serves another—even while on the cross.*

This wasn't the only example of Jesus' serving heart. One of the other Gospel writers tells us Jesus showed concern for his mother as well. The point is, **Jesus didn't make the suffering all about himself.** Have you ever noticed when you are going through a severe trial, that when you pray for others or serve others, your own problems don't seem so big?

2. *Jesus sees the man's heart and declares him not guilty as he repented.*

Jesus was relieving the man of his guilt, as it says in Romans:

*But to the one who **without works trusts him** who justifies the ungodly, such faith is reckoned as righteousness. ([Romans 4: 5 NRSV](#))*

This kingdom of God is so good, **when you learn of it you want to be part of it.** As we seek the kingdom, we cannot help but feel unqualified to enter it. This leads to repentance and an acknowledgment of who Jesus is and what he has done for us.

The criminal acknowledged his guilt, "we indeed have been condemned justly." But then he saw Christ for who he was and asked to be forgiven and included.

And Christ responded—that's what he does. He hears the cries of his people. He came to remove our guilt by paying the penalty for our wrongs through the body broken and blood shed on the cross. Notice that Jesus does and will continue to do the work of forgiving. **He declares us forgiven by his work of salvation, not by any work we do.**

3. *Jesus was **with him in suffering.***

This part is something beautiful to comprehend. It would be easy to say Jesus didn't have a choice who was to be crucified with him, but it would be a mistake to make this assumption. The God who prophesied how Jesus would come into the world and how he would leave the world is the same God who could orchestrate who was to be crucified so we could learn more about our King and learn from this man's acceptance of Jesus.

The criminal on the cross teaches us many things, the least of which is that God looks on the heart. This story reminds us that works are not necessary for salvation; rather, they are the result of receiving the gift of salvation. **This story reminds us that God is willing to go to great lengths to reach out to us.** It reminds us that **we are not alone in our suffering.** It reminds us that when we recognize the King, we are invited into the kingdom.

Jesus is the King of a radical kingdom—a kingdom for the broken, the poor, the sinners, the hungry, the downtrodden, the helpless, the hopeless, and even those who believe they don't fit into one or more of these categories. **He will return as King of kings and Lord of lords, never forcing anyone to follow him, but rewarding all who do.**

This radical kingdom of God was brought to all of humanity by the Son of God—Jesus Christ—and is now carried on through his body, the church, you and me.

Let's look at the words Paul used in Colossians, words that are also included in this week's theme. These words come right after Paul tells us we should give thanks to the Father for rescuing us from darkness and transferring us to the kingdom of his beloved Son. **Then Paul describes the Son: I picture this as words of the Father about his beloved Son Jesus.**

He 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 NRSV](#))

The kingdom of God, the rule of Christ as the King of Kings, comes to bring justice and righteousness into the world. We are ambassadors to that kingdom; we are to bring justice and righteousness into this world because we are the body of Christ. We are to bring righteous and justice into this world because Christ lives in.

One final point: Just as the Father honors the Son, and we too honor our King, one day in the future Jesus will be honored by all mankind as the perfect king because they will know Him and see his mission, his identity and how he views people—**Example of Solomon—a glimpse of what People will say about J.1 Kings 3:28**

When all Israel heard the verdict the king had given, they held the king in awe, because they saw that he had wisdom from God to administer justice.

Let's never forget our mission. Let's never forget our identity. Let's never stop viewing people as those whom God loves and forgives.