

Luke 23:33-43. Colossians 1:11-20

On this Christ the King Sunday think of what we in America name king... Elvis, the king of rock and roll, or King James, better known as LeBron James the basketball player, or King Henry (Tennessee Titans football running back Derrick Henry). Men who are at the top of their game. Our culture isn't familiar with kings who rule. We don't know how to live under a monarchy, do we? We have recently witnessed a great show of royalty as Queen Elizabeth's funeral was widely televised, but even in England the monarchy can't be compared to living under the rule of a king or queen as a domineering dictator with great power. Someone like Herod in the Bible. Someone not to take lightly.

So what does it mean when we proclaim Jesus as King? Today's reading from Colossians is the closest description of Jesus as King that we'll ever find. It is thought that originally it was a hymn used during worship. It tells us we have been brought into the "kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins." There is only one unforgivable sin, blaspheming the Holy Spirit. I've heard this unforgivable sin explained by Rev. Ron Lavin as refusing to forgive or be forgiven. Because if we refuse to act with the Holy Spirit and repent of our sins we cannot be forgiven. So we are brought into the kingdom by believing that Jesus is God's son who will forgive when we repent.

The passage then goes on to say that Jesus is the visible image of the invisible God. Does this mean God physically looks like Jesus? Perhaps. But then wouldn't we also look like Jesus? Because we are made in the image of God. So I believe that it means that Jesus is made up of everything God possesses, all the goodness of God. Then what keeps us, we who are made in God's image, from being able to do all the miracles that Jesus performed? I believe that just as Jesus was given free will and was able to completely follow God's will, we on the other hand were given free will but are unable to completely follow God's will. We sin; Jesus never did.

Jesus is before all things, the head of the body, which is the church. We are his hands and feet. Since we aren't usually able to perform miracles what does it mean to be the hands and feet of Jesus? To reach out to those who are on the margins. Last week's scripture from Thessalonians said not to give food to those who won't work for it, but those instructions related to the people in Paul's time who were so certain Jesus was going to return immediately that they didn't bother with any worldly things, such as working for a living. If food was supposed to be withheld from anyone who didn't work, where would that leave the widows and children that God has always insisted be fed? If we are the hands and feet of Jesus we are to care for the hungry, the sick, the poor, the downtrodden, those in prison. Those are the words of Jesus in Matthew 25.

Jesus is to have first place in everything. That means our hearts recognize Jesus as their ruler. We look to Jesus before we make any choice. I think I've mentioned in the past that when Bill and I were looking for a house, after our realtor showed us the house we currently live in, we prayed and put the decision in the hands of Jesus. We pray about our giving to the church and other non-profits. We open our lives to allow Jesus to guide us in all areas. Jesus is before all things and in him all things hold together.

The reading from Colossians ends by saying, "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."

Jesus bought us with his blood on the cross, his sacrifice paid the price for all our sin. That's why on this Christ the King Sunday we hear the words from the gospel of Luke regarding the crucifixion of Jesus. What kind of a king is killed in the most humiliating way? A king who has lived a humble life of service.

As Jesus was hanging on the cross the soldiers taunted him. The criminal taunted him. The crowd taunted him. This man with enough power to strike down the crowd and free himself from the cross agreed to die a humiliating death. Only his followers, most of whom had fled for their own protection, and the second man on the cross recognized him for who he was, an innocent man who had committed no crime. A man who is willing to give his life so that we can have new life.

This gospel, normally heard on or near Good Friday, brings us the promise that since Jesus has overcome death, we too will overcome death. The story hasn't made its way to the empty tomb yet, so how do we know Jesus overcomes death? By his words to that one criminal, "Today you will be with me in paradise." What a wonderful promise for one who knows he is guilty to hear. "Today you will be with me in paradise."

I have to admit, when I think about kings and queens, I don't think about rock and roll, I don't think about sports. I think about a fairytale world where it is perpetual summer, and everyone lives surrounded by elegance with all they need, in a warm castle with a tall wall surrounding green pastures and shade trees. My idea of paradise. Of course the paradise Jesus is promising the criminal is nothing like my fantasy. It is far greater. The book of Revelation describes it to be a city with a crystal river, streets paved with gold, giant pearls on the gates and fruit trees lining the way. We are given a hope of something far more beautiful to come replace what we are currently living in.

Jesus wore a crown of thorns and had a mocking sign reading "King of the Jews" hung above him. Pilate has arranged for it — in fact, he insisted on it. It suggests the crime for which the he is being executed: "This is the King of the Jews." Yes, Jesus is a King, but his kingdom far outranks Pilate's. His throne is far greater than Herod the Great's. Jesus came preaching the good news of the Kingdom. He told us about it in parables. The crowd he fed tried to crown him king. He was welcomed as a King as he rode on the back of a donkey into Jerusalem. The sign told the truth.

Ironic isn't it, that the scene we hear of in this gospel reading does not paint the picture of any king? Yet here we have the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. In his suffering we find compassion. In his suffering we find kinship. We find that Jesus understands what it is like to suffer pain. Jesus understands human pain. He conquered that pain. Not only did he conquer pain, but he overcame death. And he did it all for us. All glory be to God.