

**Pastor Mollie's Sermon**  
**November 24, 2019**  
**Luke 23:33-43- Christ the King Sunday**

I love a good story.

I particularly love a good story, in the form of movies.

And as we head into the holiday season this week, that means a LOT of good movies are scheduled to come out in the next couple of weeks.

(Show of hands: Has anyone else seen "Frozen 2" already? "It's a Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood?")

There are so many ways that the production can tell the story.

But some of the ones I appreciate best are the ones that rely on prolepsis.

Um...I'm sorry, Mollie - they rely on what?

Well, like any good movie, let me leave that question as a plot point that we will come back to.

So as we focus on this "scene" of this morning's sermon,

Perhaps, like any good avid and engaged movie watcher, you can connect the dots and figure out the end before I get there...

Because, let's be honest, after reading this morning's gospel lesson, it seems to be a bit out of place...right?

Talking about Jesus in the midst of his crucifixion shouldn't be what we are talking about the week before Advent...

Or should we?

This final Sunday of the liturgical year - before we begin with Advent next week - is called "Christ the King" Sunday.

Christ the King Sunday is not an ancient high and holy day. It began being observed in the mid-1920s, a practice

instituted by Pope Pius XI.

Eventually, the liturgical feast changed dates and made its way to Protestant churches as well.

Which brings us here - to this final Sunday of one liturgical year.

And just before Advent.

The season where we prepare for the coming of Christ as a baby on Christmas.

The readings during Advent remind us of the end of days, which will usher in the reign of Christ.

The purpose of Advent is to prepare us both for the coming of Christ on Christmas, and for the second coming of the last day.

To read this week of the ending before we start next week at the beginning.

A "prolepsis".

Have you figured out its definition yet?

Prolepsis is a "flashing forward" to a moment later in the chronological sequence of events...

So, a movie starting with its ending and then launching itself to the beginning of the story is...utilizing prolepsis.

Some more recent movies that make use of this type of storytelling include The Notebook- where Main characters Ali and Noah are seen in their 80's, Forrest Gump, sitting on the bench waiting for the bus and telling his story...

Titanic- we meet the main character Rose in her 90's before going back and sharing her story...

With hopefully a better understanding of where we are from a "cinematography" standpoint, let's come back to the reason we are here: better comprehending the reign of Christ.

Jesus will be raised and sit at the right hand of God.

Jesus will defeat death, conquer sin, and save the world not through military might and worldly wealth, but through vulnerable, sacrificial love.

In the most unassuming of ways - but if we focus our sights on infant who is to come, then we may be missing all of the ways that the one who reigns is unassuming.

Jill Duffield, an editor says "The Gospel text seems to confirm rather than counter the assessment that Christ the King is potentially fake news.

"Jesus, labeled king of the Jews in irony and as a means to further humiliate him, is gawked at by the crowd, scoffed at by the leaders, mocked by the soldiers and derided even by the criminal who hangs beside him.

"Jesus, the king, remains passive, acted upon through most of these verses, hardly like any earthly monarch.

"And that is the point.

"Jesus is like no earthly ruler.

"Jesus is the antithesis of dictators, bullies and power brokers.

"King Jesus does not coerce or intimidate, use violence or bribery to get his way.

"The One who rules heaven and earth hangs powerless on the cross for the sake of the ones hanging beside him, both the criminal who recognizes him and the one who blasphemes him.

"He takes on the sin of the spectators and the scoffers, the mockers and the deniers.

"Christ the King is like no other. He came not to be served, but to serve.

"He came not to stand apart from the least of these, but to take their place. He came not to puff himself up but to pour himself out."

As it was throughout his whole ministry, Jesus was not one who wanted to draw attention to himself.

In the best attempts at being unassuming - which, to be honest, wasn't always easy - and when it wasn't, he instructed people not to say anything to anyone about what he had done.

In this gospel text this morning, we find someone who is deeply humiliated.

We see here a man who has to suffer injustice that harms him.

What is revealed in this text is miserable, deeply moving, even shocking.

We would prefer to hide our faces as we watch someone who is truly honorable tortured, because even our compassion is not able to help him.

To say to this helpless man, "Save yourself!" is to mock him.

To call him "the King of the Jews" is to ridicule him.

These last moments of Jesus' life all seem to be in contrast to what is valued as great in our world.

In this world, the ideal is to be rich and beautiful and influential.

In this world, one has to be successful.

The ruler of this kingdom does not help himself, but he helps others who need his help ([Luke 23:35](#)).

Still more: he does not meet evil with evil, but repays evil with good.

Indeed, he forgives the people who do not know the evil things they arrange by asking his Father in heaven to forgive them ([v. 34](#)).

Still more: he allows someone condemned to hell to implore him, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom" ([v. 42](#)).

Before we get caught up in the hustle and bustle of the holidays (if we aren't already), it is important for us to make this stop in the story - both the ending and the beginning at the same time.

We need to be reminded of - as Paul's letter to the Colossians reminds us - the strength and power that God has - and chooses not to use - through his son - the one who holds all things together.

As we conclude the scene this morning with our eyes fixed on next week, may we keep this prolepsis in mind.

May we think about the power and majesty of one who is, indeed, King of the Jews.

May we be reminded of this week's story as we head back to the beginning.

For what, in my opinion, is one of the greatest story ever told.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.