

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

We are here, the last week of the church year, today, Christ the King Sunday. When you think of a king, what do you think of? A man who has a crown, scepter, and sits on a throne and has control of great territories? King Charles of England whose membership in the royal family allows him political action only when directed by the Parliament? Normally kings have a lot of prestige, fancy clothing, and impeccable etiquette. If, after hearing the gospel reading from Luke this morning you would say Jesus doesn't sound like an earthly king you would be right. Jesus rules not by wealth or status but by love. The reading sounds more like a Good Friday than Christ the King reading, because we need to know why we are celebrating the birth of Jesus before we begin to celebrate the birth of our King.

Who would believe a king would allow himself to be crucified? Crucifixion is a slow, torturous death, in which the victim dies basically by suffocation. Jesus is put on a cross like a common criminal, between two other common criminals. On the one side the criminal is goading him to save them all with his special powers. This man represents those who are in the crowd jeering against Jesus. The crowd is taunting Jesus, they blaspheme against God, they call him the King of the Jews. When they give Jesus the title King of the Jews they believe they are being derogatory, what they don't understand is that Jesus truly is King of the Jews. He is the long awaited Messiah, they just don't recognize him.

The other criminal realizes that Jesus is innocent, understands that he is capable of giving something more important than life: salvation. Jesus grants him salvation that very moment. This tells us that it is never too late to turn to Jesus to receive forgiveness. This criminal allows us to see that it is possible to receive genuine faith quickly, even under extremely difficult circumstances. Jesus recognizes this man's faith and grants forgiveness and salvation.

It is not only the criminal who receives forgiveness. Jesus cries, "Father, forgive them for they don't know what they are doing." Jesus is experiencing the most painful death, and even during this difficult time Jesus remains humble and loving. He is not a King who uses power for power's sake. His throne is not used to rule people with authoritarian actions. Jesus rules out of love and service. Jesus is a servant leader, unlike any human king we can imagine.

The reading from Colossians chapter 1 tells us that God, through Jesus, shares his power with us, allowing us to find the strength through him to remain patient while enduring hardships and joyfully give thanks in all circumstances. Jesus rescues us from the power of darkness and forgives our sin. The writer of Colossians goes on to tell us that Jesus was with God in creation. That Jesus is the firstborn from the dead. That Jesus is the head of the church. And that through the blood of his cross all things are reconciled to God. Jesus died on the cross so that the world may one day be one with God. Somehow, our lives are to be a reflection of the life of Jesus.

Do you recall seeing the signs indicating exits and destinations that are mainly located on the interstates? At night they reflect the light of the car's headlights to illuminate them so they are readable. Some of them have had their reflective coating worn off, making them dark and hard to read. They need repaired or replaced.

It's true, the world around us is dark. There is death and destruction. There are crimes. There is injustice. There is insensitivity to the needs of the world. We are like

road signs, created by God to reflect God's glory. We are created in the image of God so we may reflect God's image to the dark world.

Our world needs people who reflect the light of God's love. We need to be like the road sign that point toward the good news of God's peace, God's justice, God's joy. But sin has come into our lives, making us more like the darkened signs. Instead of reflecting God's light, we've absorbed the world's darkness and reflect that rather than God's light.

Paul in his letter to the Colossians invites us to have our coating renewed, to be reconciled with God so that we may effectively reflect the glory of God. I was at a retreat one time where the presenter wore a t-shirt with the saying, "Be like the moon. Reflect the Son's light". But of course all of this is a metaphor because there is not a light source that comes from God to us and then is reflected. However, light has been a powerful symbol of God's presence. Think about the pillar of light that by night guided the Hebrew people in the wilderness. 1 John 1:5 says "God is light. In him there is no darkness at all." In the upcoming Advent season we use light to remind us of God coming into our dark world.

Yet God is invisible. We are not able to see God with our eyes but with our hearts. God's light is like love, you can't see it or touch it, but you know it is real. We reflect God through our actions done through love. Paul reminds us that there is a difference between the way Jesus reflects God's glory and the way we do.

Maybe you remember from high school science classes that there is real light and imaginary light. Real light has a source, such as a lightbulb or a fire. Imaginary light is simply a reflection of real light. Real light casts shadows. When we see a reflection of a lamp in a mirror, imaginary light, that light can cast no shadows. Jesus is the true light illuminating the world. We are only reflecting this light. Jesus is the true and complete image of the invisible God, we are, at our best, a reflection of that image.

Most of our fluorescent lights in our church building have been replaced by LED lights. Thankfully they are a high quality light or they would emit radio waves that would interfere with our wifi and radio signals. God, who is invisible, is like the radio waves. They cannot be seen, but their effects are all around us in positive ways. They transmit signals, they turn our tv's on and off, they open our garage doors, they cook food in microwave ovens. The fact that we can't see them doesn't make them any less real. But somehow we have a more difficult time understanding a God who is invisible. We want to see God, we want to hear God's voice, we want to touch God.

In response to our needs God came to us in human form, in the life and body of Jesus. We see the image of God most clearly in the death of Jesus because Jesus gave himself completely for us and to us. In dying he revealed to us the true nature of God. In his death we witnessed the true light of God illuminating for us the nature of God's kingdom and the promise of God's reign in our lives.

Christ is coming. But it's also true that Christ has come. Jesus will reign as King. But it is also true that Jesus already reigns as King. It's our task to reflect these truths. It's our task to point others to the true light of God, the real light that illumines us in a dark and dreary world. Thanks be to the invisible God who is reflected in the lives of people like you and me.

All glory be to God.