

St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Luke 23:35-43

“So That We Might Live”

Today we celebrate the feast of Christ the King. We are just about to enter into the most blessed “season of preparation” – the season of Advent. We all know what that leads to – one of the greatest celebrations of all – when Jesus Christ came into the world as a baby – to set the world straight. It had been wobbling since the ‘fall.’ Jesus came to sacrifice Himself!

- Just one week from today we will be embarking on that beloved season, when we get to light a different candle each week (and we even explain to you why one of them is ‘pink’ or ‘rose.’ Preparing and readying to remember and celebrate the birth of Our Lord Jesus Christ.
- Meanwhile we are also to be aware that we need to always be in preparation for His coming again.

Our Gospel reading today jumps toward the end of the Gospel of Luke to right to the Crucifixion – where we read of Christ finally being recognized as King but recognized in mockery.

- He is given a sign, a placard – nailed at the top of the cross - declaring Him as the King of the Jews – but again it was mockery.
- A royal cupbearer brings King Jesus a drink – but it is foul, cheap, sour wine – not a drink fit for a king, instead a drink for the poor.
- He is given a crown – only it is a crown of thorns.
- Even His robes were divided casting lots in mockery and jest.

Jesus of Nazareth was crucified –

- hung between two ‘real’ criminals –
- killed in the cruelest of ways – **nailed to a tree!**
- Jesus was taunted by one of them – who derided Him saying “*Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!*”
- The other one recognized that Jesus had done nothing wrong – and then asked Jesus for something that only the King could give - mercy – to be remembered when Jesus came to His kingdom.

These two criminals are a perfect example of the two ways in which people live: one denying Christ, making a mockery of everything that He is, and that He has done; and the other is seeking Him, acknowledging His Kingship, His Lordship, asking for His forgiveness and wanting to spend all of eternity in His glorious presence. Remember last week’s sermon – the choice? You can Know peace in Jesus Christ – or Know No peace - without Him!

Sin separates us from God. We are all sinners – there is not one person here today that has not committed a sin in their life. Hopefully you have gone before the Lord, seeking true forgiveness in true repentance and faith. We cannot, if we are in the state of sin, come into His holy presence - God is holy – and because of that sin simply cannot come into His presence. Please hear the words from the Prophet Isaiah 59:1-2 “*See, the LORD's hand is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear. Rather, your iniquities have been barriers between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear.*” God does not want us to be apart from Him. He wants us to be with Him. You know what - only God can save

us – only God can bridge the divide so that we can cross over to Him and be in His grace, His mercy, His love and His presence. Sin has to be punished! If God left us alone – we would have absolutely no hope!

Have you seen the movie “National Treasure?” Nicholas Cage and a cast of others is searching for the supposed greatest physical treasure known to mankind (the scrolls of Alexandria and more) – and is following clues left by our colonial forefathers. When he was captured and confronted by the FBI – the lead agent tells him – “Ben, somebody’s got to go to jail!” That line recurs several times in the film – the fact that the price had to be paid holds true in all of our lives. The price – the cost – **the wages of sin has to be paid** – and we all know that “*the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*” (Romans 6:23) That is GREAT NEWS!

Since the price is death – the price for the covering of our sins – for reconciliation – a word that I use each Sunday during the ‘comfortable words’ “propitiation” the payment of our debt, the satisfaction or atonement – that price has to be paid!

God promised a means for someone else to pay our debt – and to shed His own blood – for us. All the way back in Genesis 22 – Abraham was leading his only son, Isaac, up the mountain that would one day be called Mt. Zion. Isaac was carrying the wood for his sacrifice right on his back - and he asked his father: “*The fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?*” Abraham said, “*God himself will provide the lamb.*” (Genesis 22:7-8) All the way back in Genesis – God promised that He Himself would provide the lamb – He Himself – in the person of His Son – Jesus Christ. “*And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.*” (John 1:14) Grace is not just something that we say before we eat! Grace is something that we receive. Does anyone like to receive a gift? Everyone likes to receive a gift – especially when there are no strings attached. That’s grace! The FREE gift from God that we get that we don’t deserve. That’s grace. John’s Gospel continues with verse 18: “*No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.*” **God, Himself, provided the Lamb!**

- That is why we celebrate today.
- That is why we begin in preparation for the remembrance of His birth.
- That is why we recall His death, Resurrection, and Ascension – and His promise to come again.
- He is indeed Christ the King – the one who paid our price – and died in our place – once – so that all may live!

Everybody loves the baby in the manger. If you have ever been to Radio City Music Hall in New York City – after all the high leg kicks and Santa and everything else, the last 20 minutes of the program is the Gospel – the Nativity; a living Nativity. They don’t shy away from saying ‘who’ is born. It is amazing, in the midst of New York City – go figure! Everybody loves the Christmas songs, the presents, the star, the shepherds, the angels, the wise men – the gold, the frankincense, and the myrrh. But not everyone loves what all that represents - because that is only the beginning of the story. In order for salvation to come –

- there has to be a Good Friday –

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- there has to be a scourging,
- a crown of thorns,
- there has to be three nails,
- and there has to be a cross.

Some people have a difficult time with a Savior who convicts us as sinners, asking us to repent and be transformed by His love. Some people only hear what Jesus said just before today's Gospel in Luke 23:34 "*Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.*" Thinking that Jesus was letting the world off the hook – because of ignorance! No, Jesus was asking for forgiveness in order to give us the opportunity to make the choice ourselves – which way to live – in sin; separated from Almighty God, or forgiven – washed clean by His blood – and the sacrifice that He made on the cross – "*so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.*" (John 3:16) **Jesus Christ asked for forgiveness – so that you and I might live!**

Paul, in his letter to the Colossians 1:15-20 reminds us that Jesus "*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.*"

My brothers and sisters in Christ,

- our lives should be about the Lamb that took our place on the Cross;
- our lives should be about preparing to join Him when He gloriously comes again; and
- our lives should be about living the message of forgiveness and love that can only be found in Jesus Christ – "*the Way, the Truth, and the Life*" (John 14:6) - sharing that message in everything we think, do and say. I think it was attributed to St. Francis of Assisi who said "preach the Gospel always, and if necessary – use words!" As consistent Christians – we can tell others what Christ the King did – so that we might live.