

Last Sunday after Pentecost, Christ the King, Sunday, November 20, 2022, Year C

St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA:

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Luke 23:35-43

“Glory To the King”

Today is the Feast of Christ the King, and it is the last Sunday after Pentecost. You will notice that the church is not decorated in green, but instead today the church is white because it is a very special occasion. Next week the church begins another season, the “season of Advent, right in front of me will be the Advent Wreath with the four candles, and everything will turn to purple, including the priest and deacon. We being in a season of the greatest celebrations of all, from Christ the King to the four Sundays of Advent, and then the greatest celebration of all, Christmas when we remember Jesus Christ coming into the world as a baby, with the precious gift of salvation through His sacrifice for us. During this Thanksgiving Week – think about it - we truly have so much to be thankful for!

Next Sunday, we begin the penitential season of Advent, when we light a different candle each of the 4 weeks – three purple and one that is ‘pink’ or the liturgical color ‘rose.’ Advent is a season of preparing to remember and celebrate the birth of Our Lord Jesus Christ, but preparing ourselves for His coming again. Matthew chapter 25 tells us, that the Son of Man will come again on a cloud with great glory, a trumpet will sound and angels will welcome Him in. Come Lord Jesus! There were angels the first time when Jesus was born, and there will be angels when Jesus comes again. Come Lord Jesus!

Our Gospel reading today is at the very end of the Gospel of Luke and is one of the most painful readings, usually reserved for Good Friday. Jesus Christ is finally being recognized as a King but He is recognized in mockery. A sign is nailed at the top of the cross declaring Him as the King of the Jews but once again it was in mockery. Also in mockery a Roman soldier acting as a royal cupbearer, brings King Jesus a drink of foul, cheap, sour wine. This is certainly not a drink fit for a king, but instead it is a drink for the poor. Then to top it all off Jesus is given a crown, not a glorious golden crown, but a crown of thorns, and it struck deep into His head. Then the soldiers divided His robes, casting lots in mockery and jest.

Jesus of Nazareth, our King, was crucified and hung between two ‘real’ criminals, in one of the cruelest of ways imaginable being nailed to the cross. I just cannot even imagine a spike being driven through your hand, then the other hand, and then one being put through your ankles, to get it through the bone. One of the criminals taunted Jesus, saying “*Are you not the Christ? 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, for him to be remembered when Jesus came into His kingdom. These two criminals are a perfect example of the two ways in which people can choose to live:

- One is denying Christ, making a mockery of everything that He is, that He has done, making a joke out of Him, and just calling Him a good teacher, a preacher but not the Son of God,

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- and the other hand - one is seeking Him, acknowledging His Kingship, His Lordship, and asking for His forgiveness, wanting to spend all of eternity in His glorious presence. We should be talking to Jesus on a regular basis, having a conversation, and a relationship with Him.

The painful truth is that sin separates us from God and we need to remember that we are all sinners, with no exception. There is not one person here today that has not committed a sin in their life. Does anyone here walk on water? Does anyone change water into wine? Does anyone here perform miracles on a regular basis... no you don't. You are regular people, you are not God – you are human, and yet God provides something for each one of us sinners – to be able to get what we don't deserve. You see if each one of us got what we deserve we would be dying a painful, painful death – and yet, He gives us forgiveness and mercy – so that we don't get what we deserve. Think about that. That is how much He loves you! It is by grace, through faith that we are saved. I pray that you have brought your sins before the Lord, seeking His forgiveness. It is that easy. He wants to forgive you. God is holy, and because of your sin you simply cannot come into His presence. When that sin is forgiven – it is washed away, whiter than white. I want to share with you some important words that were written about 600 years before Jesus was born, 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 for us to be apart from Him. Only God can save us and 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! But the punishment was taken – it was done. It was done in the cross for you and me. You have heard the term – “Jesus paid the price” and what a price it was.

It is heartbreaking to read about the cross and the mocking of Jesus as King of the Jews. Jesus has clearly expressed and has shown the true meaning of His kingship, Lordship, and the meaning of the kingdom itself. He has reached out to people who others might consider the wrong people, tax collectors and sinners, and He has offered peace, hope and healing to all people of God's coming judgment. On the day that we call Good Friday, (it is usually a little warmer then) He is finally hailed as King, but it is in mockery. This is a far cry from the procession into Jerusalem that took place on the day that we call “Palm Sunday” just the Sunday before. People were laying down their cloaks and waving palm branches, and now on the cross Jesus is hailed as King, but in ridicule. Palm Sunday Jesus was exalted. The same people who were singing ‘Hosanna’ are now screaming ‘crucify Him!’ His true royalty shines out in His prayer and His promise. Unlike traditional martyrs, who died with a curse against their torturers, and murderers, Jesus prays for their forgiveness. He prayed *“Father forgive them, for they know not what they do.”* (Luke 23:34) Like a king on his way to His coronation, Jesus promises a place of honor and delight to those who requests it. Forgiveness brings the life of heaven to earth, God's future into the present.

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In our reading from the Apostle Paul's letter to the Colossians is amazing and it is truly about a king. Let me share it with you once again. *"For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy."* (Colossians 1:13-18) Now that is truly a King!

Imagine what it would be like being in the presence of royalty. Not too many of us get to experience that because here in our country we are not led by royalty, and so unless you have had a royal invitation to meet the royal leaders of a country – you just can't imagine what it is like, or even how to behave. We have all seen movies or plays showing how royalty is portrayed, but that doesn't come close to actually being there. A lot of the Christmas movies on the new channel or on Hallmark have a theme of a woman meeting a prince and how she reacts.

One day, every believer in Jesus Christ, will be able to stand in His presence. Remember that if you have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, He will put you at ease, because you know Him and are connected with Him in a very special way. He loves you, enough to die for you! I believe that He will welcome you into His royal kingdom, welcoming you as sons and daughters of our Heavenly Father.

The image of the sacrificial lamb appears all throughout Scripture. John the Baptist said this about Jesus when He was coming toward him, *"Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"* (John 1:29) Every Sunday we sing those words that are called 'the Agnus Dei' from page 136 of our Book of Common Prayer, seeking His mercy and His peace. John the Baptist saw what no one else could see at that time that Jesus is the Lamb of God, who had come into the world to die so that we could be freed from the verdict that comes with sin.

Revelation chapter 7, gives us a glimpse of the Throne Room of the King. That chapter ends with these precious words. *"For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."* (Revelation 7:17) Jesus' love for us is everlasting, and His mercy is abundant and filled with His love.

And so today, and every day, as we worship Christ the King – we need to remember how we should live:

- 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; or calls us to be with Him – and finally,

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- our lives should be about living the message of forgiveness and love that can only be found in Jesus Christ – who told us on the night before He died - that He is “*the Way, the Truth, and the Life*” **the only way to the Father**. (John 14:6)

I want to suggest to you that the way that we can really show Christ’s love is for us to tell others what Christ the King did for us – so that they too might live.