

Last Sunday after Pentecost, Christ the King, Sunday, November 24, 2019, Year C

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

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Luke 23:35-43

“The King, the Lamb, the Savior”

This is special day in the calendar of the church year - it is called the Feast of Christ the King. It is the last Sunday in the season of Pentecost. We are no longer wearing green, but instead today is white – because it is a special occasion. Next week begins another season, and that is the “season of preparation,” which is the season of Advent – and everything will turn to purple. This is going to bring us to one of the greatest celebrations of all, from Christ the King to the four Sundays of Advent, with the Advent wreath and the beautiful candles, and then the greatest celebration of all – when Jesus Christ came into the world as a baby – to offer to the world a special gift – salvation through the sacrifice of Himself for us. Just one week from today we begin that penitential season, during which we light a different candle each week – three purple and one that is ‘pink’ or ‘rose.’ It is a season of preparing to remember and celebrate the birth of Our Lord Jesus Christ, but also to prepare ourselves for His coming again. There will come a day, as 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!

Our Gospel reading today jumps toward the very end of the Gospel of Luke right to one of the most painful readings – usually reserved for Good Friday, the Crucifixion. We read of Christ finally being recognized as King but unfortunately recognized in mockery. Jesus is given a sign, nailed at the top of the cross - declaring Him as the King of the Jews – but again it was mockery. Also in mockery a royal cupbearer, a Roman soldier, 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. And then to top it all off He is given a crown, not I diadem, a gorgeous crown, but it is a crown of thorns. They divided His robes, casting lots in mockery and jest.

Our King, Jesus of Nazareth was crucified and hung between two ‘real’ criminals, in the cruelest of ways imaginable – being nailed to the cross. Have you ever hit yourself with a hammer, trying to hang a picture or something – and owwww! Can you imagine a spike being driven through your hand, and then the other hand, and then one put through your ankles – to get it through the bone. One of the criminals taunted Jesus, 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 can live:

- one denying Christ, making a mockery of everything that He is, and 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 -
- 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. Talking to Him on a regular basis, having a conversation, a relationship with Him.

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Sin separates us from God and we need to remember that we are all sinners – there is not one person here today that has not committed a sin in their life. Does anyone here walk on water? Does anyone here change water into wine? Does anyone here have a miracle performed on a regular basis... no you don't. You are not God – you are human, and yet God provides something for each one of us – us sinners – to be able to get what we don't deserve – and that is forgiveness. I pray that you have brought your sins before the Lord seeking forgiveness. He wants to forgive you. God is holy – and because of that sin you simply cannot come into His presence. 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 us to be apart from Him. He wants us to be with Him, in relationship with Him. 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! Can you agree with me on that?

It is heartbreaking to read of the picture of the cross and the mocking of Jesus as King of the Jews. Jesus has clearly expressed and shown the true meaning of His kingship, and the meaning of the kingdom itself. He has reached out to who others might consider the wrong people, tax collectors and sinners, and offered peace, hope and healing to all people of God's coming judgment. Now He is finally hailed as King, but in mockery. This is a far cry from the procession into Jerusalem just the Sunday before. People laying down their cloaks and waving palm branches, and now on the cross He is hailed as King, but in mockery. That Sunday of the week that we call Holy Week, Jesus is 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, 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 bliss to one who requests it. Forgiveness brings the life of heaven to earth, God's future into the present.

The image that the Apostle Paul paints for us in our reading from his letter to the Colossians is amazing and truly that of 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!

I want you to imagine being in the presence of royalty. This is something that not too many get to experience. Here in this country we aren't led by royalty – and so unless you have had a royal

Last Sunday after Pentecost, Christ the King, Sunday, November 24, 2019, Year C invitation to meet the royal leaders of a country – we just can't imagine what it is like, or even how to behave. All of us have seen movies or plays in which royalty is portrayed, but that doesn't come close to actually being there. One day, every believer in Jesus Christ, will stand in His presence. The important thing to remember is that if you have a personal relationship with Jesus, He will put you at ease, because you know Him and are connected with Him in a 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 has been all throughout Scripture. We are familiar with what John the Baptist said 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 119 of our Book of Common Prayer, seeking His mercy and His peace. John 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, which we read on All Saints Sunday 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) His 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 be mindful of 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 call us to be with Him - and
- 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)

May I 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 also might live.