

Sermon for November 24, 2013

Twentieth Sixth Sunday of Pentecost, Luke 23:33-43 Christ the King Sunday

BLESSINGS TO YOU AND PEACE FROM GOD THE FATHER, OUR LORD

JESUS CHRIST, AND THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

The other morning when I was praying about our **gospel** text and the sermon that I was going to write for this Christ the King Sunday I was reminded of a conversation that my mother and I had during one of the **last** times I saw her just **before** she died. I was **sitting** at her bedside, **holding** her hand, and all of a sudden she **said** to me, *“I am sorry I was not a better mother.”* I asked her, *“What are you saying, you were a wonderful mother.”* She said, *“Please forgive me because there are things I should have done for you that I did not do and there are things, as I look back over my life, that I should have done.”* We looked each other **straight** in the eye. This was something she felt she **needed** to say. It was her **confession** to me of a burden she felt she needed to have **taken off** her shoulders before she died.

Confessions, forgiveness of past sins—perceived sins of those **committed** or of the sins of **omission**, asking to be **released** of those things which **weigh** us down, the things which may **hold** us back, and the opportunity—in **some** cases, for a **second** chance.

Do you ever wish you could have a second chance to make good on a behavior or action that you wish you could change? Perhaps a second chance to take a different point of view, a second chance to take back words that were said in **anger** or in the **heat** of the moment—you know, those words that can **never** be taken back once they are spoken, a second chance to repair a relationship, or a second chance to chase a dream or to make the most of an opportunity which you passed by. Or what about a second chance to ask for forgiveness from someone. If you are like me I would imagine there are a **few** things in your life for which you would like to have a second chance at—or—an opportunity to be forgiven for.

This morning in our gospel reading for this Christ the King Sunday or the Reign of Christ Sunday, as it has become known, we read part the **crucifixion** story from Luke's gospel. This is where Jesus' life and work in this world comes to an end. Christ **our** King is being crucified and the Reign **of** Christ will soon begin. It is where we find **our** King hanging on a cross, dirty, bloody, his body broken and beaten, with his head bowed down beneath the **sting** of a crown of thorns. There are **no** jewels for **our** king; there are **no** fine robes or signet rings, and there is certainly **no** respect. We read that Jesus was scoffed at by the leaders, people just stood by watching, and the soldiers mocked him. Yet; **2 times** in this passage Jesus offered words of forgiveness and second chances. **First**, for those who surrounded the cross and were treating him cruelly. As all this was going on

he says, *“Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.”* What they were doing was killing and mocking the Son of God, an **innocent** man. But this death was one which he **freely** received; he **humbled** himself, and was **obedient** until death, even this **deeply** humiliating and painful death. This was **no** way for **our** King to be treated.

Secondly, we heard that some of Jesus’ last words to another human being before his own death were words of **forgiveness** to the criminal who hanged beside him. A criminal who confessed to getting what he deserved in this world; yet, but because of his **fear** of God and his **faith** in who Jesus was, Jesus gave him the **gift** of eternal life by saying, *“Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.”* *Sweet forgiveness and second chance for one such sinner.* (We even have a healing hymn from the Taize community in our hymnal regarding this very request from the criminal to Jesus to remember him when he came into His kingdom. #616.)

Words of forgiveness were part and parcel of Jesus’ ministry here on earth as he ministered to the **outcasts**, the **poor**, the **sick**, the **dying**, and the **lame**. This is the **same** forgiveness which is available to each and every one of us. Even in his own pain and suffering Jesus offered a word of forgiveness and **deep** abiding love. *Who among us is worthy of such grace?* None of us are without sin no matter **how** young or **not** so young we are.

We do not know what happened to the **other** criminal who hung on the other side of Jesus' cross; the one who **also** ridiculed Him. Yet the **grace** of God is revealed to the one who **humbled** himself before Christ **our** King. For some of us it **may** be hard to believe in a God who is **so** gracious, in a God who is **so** forgiving, in a God who would love us **even** when we disappoint Him and sin against Him time and time again.

I would like to tell you a rather general story about **some** of the people who come into my office during the course of a month. **Many** of them do not go to church **nor** do they know much about what we Lutherans believe. The other day I was talking with a person who came in for a food card. They asked me what "this Lutheranism" is all about. I told them that we believe that there is **nothing** we can do that is **so** bad that we can be separated from the **love** of God. God loves us no matter what. And that there are **no works** we can do in this world that will **guarantee** us a place in God's kingdom as it is all about God's **love, grace, and mercy** toward us that saves us. It is about God's **promises** to us through our baptism, the **saving** power of Jesus' death on the cross, and his **rising** on the 3rd day that gives us salvation. This person looked at me like they had **never** heard those words before. We went on to further discuss it a bit. I gave this person a bible. They said they would be back to ask more questions about what we Lutheran's believe.

That is what this *Christ the King* or the *Reign of Christ* Sunday is all about. It is what Jesus Christ **did** and **continues** to do for each and every one of us because of **that** cross. (POINT TO THE CROSS ON THE ALTAR) *The cross changes everything.* The cross is the **center** of the Christian faith now & forever because the cross is the **window** into the **heart** of God. It reveals to us the all encompassing and never ending love of God.

I do not know—have you have *ever thought about it or do you know why our Protestant crosses are empty?* Ours has no Jesus hanging on them like some other churches do. That is because for we Protestants the **empty** cross is a **visible** reminder to us of Christ's victory over death as well as the resurrection which we will **all** share in one day. That is what Christ **our** King did for us all.

Through our weekly prayers and confession of faith Jesus' kingdom comes near and we are **all invited** to enter. His kingdom is **also** present wherever justice, mercy, love, and service to others are being shown. Being a member of His heavenly kingdom is **not** granted because we deserve to **gain** entrance—quite frankly, **none** of us are worthy of being in God's kingdom because of our **own** sinfulness—but it is because God opens it to us freely as a gift of his love. So **come, confess** your sins, be given that second, third, fourth, or fifth chance. God's forgiveness is **free** for the taking, just ask and it will be given to you, the price has

already been paid by **Christ our King**. Second chances—forgiveness—are ours
to be received. The Reign of Christ **has** begun. All **thanks** be to God. **AMEN**