

The Last Sunday after Pentecost
November 23, 2025
The Rev. Dr. Mark W. Frazier
Luke 23:33-43

Today the Church celebrates "Christ the King" or in some places, "Reign of Christ" Sunday. It's a hinge Sunday between the liturgical seasons of Ordinary Time—all those 23 Sundays after Pentecost—and Advent. It's a moment when we pause to reflect on the meaning of Christ's kingship before we start a new church year delve into the Advent mysteries of light and darkness, hope and lament, prophecy and Incarnation.

We usually associate kings with pomp and circumstance, so we might expect to hear scripture passages this morning that sound, well, *kingly*. Something glorious from the Book of Revelation, perhaps, about Jesus sitting on his throne, decked out in splendid robes and a jeweled crown. Or something majestic from Isaiah: "A son will be given to us, and the government will rest upon his shoulders." Or at least a dazzling scene from one of the Gospels: Jesus transfigured on the mountaintop. Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. Jesus emerging from the waters of baptism, the voice from heaven thundering in his ears.

But no. We find none of these. What we find instead is a crucifixion scene. A stripped and suffocating man, wracked with pain. A crowd of mockers spewing hate. A man hanging between thieves, derision in his ears, speaking

blessing and promise to someone less fortunate and less innocent than himself.

This is a good time to pause for a moment and contemplate the paradox that lies at the heart of our Christian faith. This is our king. *Our king*. If there is any point in the Christian calendar that should catch us off guard and disarm us of all our arrogance, all our self-righteousness, all our contempt — this has to be that point. Our king is a dead man walking. His chosen path to glory is the cross. But our gospel story today tells us that if paradise was anywhere, it was there, with him.

Our time and place are marked by greed, selfishness, and bitter partisanship. In the time that the church has existed, these curses are nothing new. Our question this morning is how do we honor Christ's kingship through the remembrance of his passion and death? What does the cross offer us by way of example, warning, and benediction? What version of citizenship might we live out that will best serve and honor our King and our fellow citizens?

As I consider the images described in the scripture passages we read this morning, what strikes me most is what I *don't* see: I see no path to glory that sidesteps humility, surrender, and sacrificial love. I see no permission to secure my prosperity at the expense of another's suffering. I see no tolerance for the belief that holy ends justify degenerate means. I see no evidence that truth-telling is optional. I see no kingdom that favors the contemptuous over

the broken-hearted. And I see no church that thrives when it aligns itself with brute power.

Where does this leave us? I think it leaves us with a king who may make us profoundly uncomfortable.

Most of us are confronted frequently by the political and cultural landscape in the United States these days. When we hold up our Christian faith to this landscape, what does it show us about serving and even worshiping a king who exchanged his crown for a cross?

Maybe it's just me, but I sometimes struggle to imitate and honor a king who spoke words of blessing even in his darkest hour. I struggle to speak words of blessing in the face of pretty minor inconveniences. It's often a challenge to remember that the grace offered by our crucified Lord is neither easy nor cheap; it cost the King his life. We humans like order and certainty, we like safety and we will go to great ends to find peace. At the same time, we worship a Messiah who died because he made no peace with injustice and oppression.

I'm sometimes tempted to give up the struggle, wonder if my actions or words can make any difference, tell myself "Calm down; God's in control," And yes that's true. But each time I come to this place for worship, each time I read the gospels, each time I take the Body and Blood of the Eucharist, I'm

reminded that Jesus's kingdom is incarnational through and through. It's missing the point entirely to expect God to act when I will not.

Even as Jesus hung on the cross, he spoke hope to a thief who needed solace. He hung in the space between one man's hatred and misery and another man's hope and longing, embracing both with his broken body. *This is our king.*

My prayer for the Church during these challenging times is that we will find ways to walk as Jesus walked — to spend ourselves for love of the Other. To listen, to protect, to endure, and to bless. To find strength in the love of both friends and strangers. And to rally to the aid of the vulnerable and those in need. The truth is, the Church has always proven itself in times of peril. Peril brings forth and reveals saints and prophets. It lights holy fires. Perilous times have always taught the faithful the radical nature of love.

After Christ the King Sunday and Thanksgiving day later this week, we will enter into Advent, a season of waiting, longing, and listening. Holding firm to our vision of a better kingdom, we will walk into the expectant darkness, waiting for the light to dawn, and straining to hear the first cries of new life. Yes, there are reasons for fear. Reasons for anger, reasons for grief. But we are not a people defined by those things, but instead by hope. We are not abandoned. We know where to look for paradise. We have a king like no other. The very best of kings for this hour.