

Canterbury United Methodist Church
New Traditions
November 20, 2016
Christ the King

Text: Luke 23:33-43

Focus: In the Lukan account of the Crucifixion, Jesus shows both forgiveness and mercy in the act of his human death. The choice of this passage as the lectionary gospel for Christ the King Sunday is so central to the nature of the leadership of Jesus Christ. This nature stands in stark contrast to the nature of human political leaders of the day.

Function: Unpack the underlying meanings of Jesus, the historical human being, and the Christ, the time pre-existent second person of the Trinity. Use the nature of the sacrament of Holy Communion to illustrate both the essence of Jesus and of the Christ, in tangible form.

Prayer: Gracious and Almighty God, in the golden sunlight of this beautiful morning which You have given to us, we look around us and see You in the beauty of the world that You have created for us...we see you in the beauty of the trees, in the chill of the air, even in the reflected light of the moon at night. We follow the life and teaching, the death and resurrection of your son, Jesus whom we call the Christ, as a way of ordering our lives and reflecting who we are as your children of creation. Be with us this morning, we pray and open our hearts to understand that we owe our lives and our existence to you, that we are connected to you and You to us...and that in You alone, we place our ultimate trust and security. In the strong name of Jesus we pray...amen.

Christ the King of What/Whom?

1) About today....

- a) Today is a special, celebratory day in the Christian liturgical calendar called Christ the King Sunday...
- b) All year long, the revised common lectionary has been telling the story of Jesus' birth, life, teaching, death and resurrection. Today is the pinnacle, or the culmination of a year's worth of preaching and teaching...the last Sunday...the Sunday on which preachers all over the world will struggle to explain how Jesus Christ is the King of all Creation.

- c) This, of course, is a tall order...a feeble human trying to explain with feeble human words, something much greater that our brains can fully comprehend. So, I'm left with an opportunity to tell you how I think about this, hoping that this will be helpful to you.
- d) And so, I think it is so interesting, on this day set aside for remembering the kingship of Jesus, that the assigned scripture deals with the story of his death between two criminals on a hill outside Jerusalem...

2) Still newsworthy...

- a) Several weeks ago, you may have seen a news story out of Jerusalem, saying that archaeologists had uncovered the tomb of Jesus.
- b) The Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem is a site holy to Christian that is built over what is believed to be both the site of the crucifixion, the place where our scripture this morning happened, as well as Jesus' tomb...which would make it the physical location of the resurrection as well.
- c) Those were two pretty important events in the life of Jesus...and so over 1,700 years ago, a church was built over the spot so that it could be remembered. Over the years, the building had been attacked and rebuilt several times, but lately the years had taken its toll and the structure housing the tomb of Jesus Christ needed strengthening.
- d) As so the archaeologists, took apart the marble covering protecting the burial slab, exposing it for the first time in 500 years...it created world-wide news, right before the election...the slab of limestone where Jesus' body lay was visible again...
- e) So, I thought it was so interesting that right before America chose it's next leader, through all of the campaigning and the rhetoric, that a news story about a different kind of leader, broke through the news cycle...a leader named Jesus Christ who lived almost 2,000 years ago, but whose name still rolls off our tongues today.

3) Jesus....

- a) Jesus Christ...the name seems very natural for us to say...for us, the two names go together, almost like the first and last names of an old friend...

- b) But when we say those two names together, I believe we are saying a mouthful...we are combining two profoundly different thoughts together...so just for a moment this morning, I want to separate the thought of Jesus from the idea of The Christ...I promise that I will put them back together very shortly!
- c) For me, in my feeble human understanding, we use the name Jesus to describe the historical human being who lived on earth in the first century. In English, we call him Jesus, but in other languages he had other names...in the ancient Hebrew, he would have been called Yeshua, or Joshua.
- d) Jesus of Nazareth was a Jewish rabbi who lived in first century Israel. He preached, taught, and healed among us humans for a little over 30 years. His brand of teaching and preaching threatened the religious and secular leadership of the day, and he was ultimately executed and the powers of the day thought they had done away with him. Little did they know they were dealing with a different kind of leader.
- e) In our faith, we believe that Jesus was The Incarnation...which is our way of thinking that God chose to live among us in human form for 30 years or so, as a way of showing us a real life example of what God is like. Bill Morgan used to call this idea "God with skin on."
- f) And so when we talk about Jesus, at one level, we are talking about a human, like we are human, who lived in our history at an identifiable point in time. He has a place in our history books...he lived a life so different that we still remember him almost 2,000 years later.

4) The Christ....

- a) When we talk about Christ, I think we are talking about something different altogether.
- b) For me, the term Christ refers to the second person of the Trinity, that existed before time began...
- c) The Christ is what the Gospel of John calls the Word...with a capital W. John's Gospel says this:
 - i) "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life..."

- d) I think that what this means is that our world, and everything in it, was created by the Christ. Now, I'm off in deep water here trying to tell you about the Trinity of God, but I believe that everything we see and enjoy about our natural world, has its origin in creation through the Christ.
- e) Let that sink in for a moment...think about the air we breath and the water we drink...the plants of the earth that we eat for nourishment...the beauty of the forest and the mountains that we love to look at which serve as homes for creatures that live there. All of nature, sometimes called "the first Bible" laid out across time not only as a home for us, but as a physical manifestation of what God is like and the depth of his love for us as part of his creation.
- f) This is what I think we mean when we say the Christ...the deeply Divine that is the source of our life, it is the source of life for everything that lives on the planet, and it is the source of life for the planet itself.

5) The Sacrament

- a) One of the things that I love most about New Traditions is our practice of observing the sacrament of Holy Communion each week.
- b) A sacrament is a physical way of reminding us about something that is not physical in nature...something tangible that represents something which is intangible.
- c) And in this sacrament, I see the combining of Jesus and the Christ...
- d) From the elements of creation, or nature, provided for us by Christ, I see wheat, which is turned into flour which is made into bread. And from the grapes of the vine, these are turned into liquid, which are then turned into wine (or in our case grape juice!)...
- e) These tangible elements of communion represent the intangible love of God, expressed through creation...
- f) And in the words and actions of the liturgy, Jesus gives us the structure of meal, which nourishes our physical bodies, but also nourishes our eternal souls...
- g) Because as we take in the physical bread and wine, those become part of our body. In a real sense, His body becomes part of our body, and the divine meets the physical...

h) And in the remembrance of the Sacrament, we are reminded over and over again, about the way in which we are part of God's great creation.

6) **And so....**

a) And so the question for you and I here today on Christ the King Sunday is how is it that you chose to understand your life here on this earth?

b) Where will you place your trust...toward what ideals will you choose to devote your life?

c) Will you align your allegiance with earthly leaders who come and go with the frequency of elections...

d) Or will you place your trust in the steadfast hands of the God who made this earth, in the hands who made these elements of bread and wine for you...in the hands which took nails for you with words of forgiveness on His lips, and ultimately gives Himself for you...

e) Which leader will you choose to follow?

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.