

## **“Gratitude for Christ the King”**

**Luke 23:33-43**

Today, we end a lectionary reading cycle, called Year C, and end one liturgical year or you may call it a Christian Year. We will start a new church calendar next Sunday, with the first Sunday of Advent. Advent is the period of four Sundays before Christmas. From next Sunday, we will be reading the Gospel Lesson mostly from the Gospel of Matthew.

Today is called Christ the King Sunday, the Sunday to honor Jesus as our King of kings and Lord of Lords, as sung by Rev. Ted Travis, and as the King of glory and the King of my heart, as Chris sang. Christ the King Sunday is, in a way, the culmination of the entire Christian year.

To call Jesus the King may not be an appealing concept to us, who live in a modern world. Also, we, who live in constitutional democracies, may find Kingship to be a problematic or unfamiliar concept. The founding and continuing political philosophy of this country rejects kingship and chooses governance with the consent of the governed. We don't like to be “ruled” by someone. We like to choose our own ways without being directed by someone, and even by Someone beyond us.

The Gospel lesson for today, however, calls Jesus and claims him as “King of the Jews.” For the final reading from the Gospel of Luke for this year, we come to the execution of Jesus. At the core of the conversations around the cross, as Luke records it, is a discussion about what it means to be “King of the Jews” or “Christ the King.” The crowds jeer at him to save himself. An inscription above his head simply declared him “King of

the Jews,” as a cynical title for the man being executed and as an unfitting sign to the Jewish people that any who dared assume such a title should expect a similar outcome. One of the criminals hanging beside him mocked him, while another took the title seriously. They were guilty, he reasoned, but Jesus was not. “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” Jesus remembered him right there, in his kingdom, or in his reign, and promised him paradise.

So, for those who are willing to place ourselves under his reign, Jesus is the Christ the King. He is not, however, an ordinary king, who sits in a big, well cushioned chair covered with tapestry or velvet. His throne was the cross. Jesus on the cross was fully in his kingdom reigning from the cross. This is our Christ the King, forgiving sinners and welcoming any who ask to be remembered in paradise. Mercy rules the day, not violence, not any trappings of earthly powers. Our Christ the King is the King of Love.

So today, as we end this Christian year and before we start a new year with the birth of Jesus, let’s pause and honor Jesus as our Christ the King. He grew up as a carpenter’s son and entered a public ministry when the time came. He preached about God’s reign, healed the sick, ate with sinners and became their friends, was hung on the cross for no sin but for our sin-- and was raised from the dead to rule the world with his reign.

This week we celebrate Thanksgiving. As we count the blessings we have received, let us be thankful, above all, for Christ, who reigns as our King and is the same yesterday, today and forever. Amen.