

Sermon Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> November 2022  
Feast of Christ the King  
Text: Luke 23:33-43

What a fascinating reading from the Gospel of Luke,  
on this the last day of the church's year.

This day which could be described as the pinnacle of the church's year.

*A day in which we remember, and are in fact urged to respond to, the declaration that Christ is King.*

And yet right at the pinnacle moment,  
right at the moment of making that declaration,  
we are thrown off balance  
because we are presented with a paradox,  
one we cannot avoid.

Because on this "*Christ the King*" day,  
we hear the account of an *execution* –  
an execution of the one,  
the Messiah, who was spreading the 'good news' of God's kingdom.

Even on this last Sunday, before the cycle starts again,  
Luke does again, what he did  
when describing this same Messiah's birth.

All the power is out of kilter.

At his birth, Jesus, the Messiah  
is born in a stable, to non-entities,  
hidden from the world,  
announced to the powerless first (shepherds)  
and only then to the powerful (Herod),  
who end up looking powerless.

Now, Jesus, the Messiah,  
he who cured the sick,  
who taught with such power  
who released people from their bondage,  
be it physical, mental or spiritual,

this Jesus is now 'scoffed' and *derided*.  
He is dying and those in authority  
respond with mockery.

Seemingly the victors celebrate.  
The losers *die*.  
*Luke pulls no punches, it is meant to be sickening.*

*Why choose such a passage for 'Christ the King' Sunday?  
After all, the winners and losers are in the wrong places.  
Aren't they??  
They are the wrong way around.*

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Of course,  
as with His birth, so now with his death,  
if we look closely,  
there is evidence of a deeper story or narrative going on.  
There are clues to be seen.....

What do we see, if we once get beneath  
the awful event that are being played out on the surface?

The first thing I see is Jesus is here named,  
on two occasions, 'Messiah'.  
He is called the 'chosen one'.

Another thing I see is that  
two times he is called or better, identified,  
as the 'King of the Jews'.

And then lastly, we hear Jesus call God 'Father'.

*What is Luke trying to do?  
Is he trying to point to a reality, an understanding of things,  
that can be easily missed  
when we are confronted by the surface story,  
a story that is filled with  
the blood and agony of Jesus' torture and death?*

What is Luke trying to say here....?  
*Could this dying one still be the 'chosen one of God'?*

And even if not intentional,  
the ongoing effect of this, I suppose we can only say,  
"sprinkling" of divine names,  
is meant to point us to something more.

We look at one who appears to be losing,  
yet, are reminded throughout of his divinity.

*It forces us to look deeper.*

And as we continue to do,  
we notice other things also,  
such as the two criminals crucified with Jesus.  
And the divided response they have in response to him.

Interestingly, their words are alarmingly similar:  
both criminals recognise *divinity* in Jesus;  
both ask to be *saved*.

But one speaks with *derision*; the other speaks *genuinely*.  
One of them *joins* in with the mockers;  
the other one *opposes* them.  
The first one *accuses Jesus*;  
the second one *asks Jesus*.

*And all this while they both see, and respond to,  
exactly the same person.*

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We might be forgiven to wanting  
a more powerful or if you like, triumphal passage  
at the pinnacle summit of the Church calendar.

Perhaps the “Transfiguration”, Jesus aglow with divinity,  
or one of Revelation’s visions of heaven  
or one of the gospel accounts of the resurrected Christ.

*But instead we find ourselves having to see and contemplate  
the sacrifice, suffering, and grace of Jesus.*

Of course, all this doesn’t suggest  
that a dead Jesus, a dead Messiah is the end of the story.  
After all, if that is what we were proclaiming –  
if that was our story of God –  
we could never call it ‘good news’.  
It would be history’s most disastrous news.

*The resurrection which follows is crucial here.*

In the midst of this horribleness,  
this sickening story,  
the seeds of a much larger story have already been sown.

The paradox of this story we get to day  
is that in the midst of it we see what the life, death,  
and resurrection of Jesus was all about.

It was about our gracious and loving God’s  
response to our unworthy request  
to be remembered by the God.

*Yes, this scene is – shockingly – the very glory of God.*

(Look beneath the surface.....)