

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

Today, we celebrate the Reign of Christ the King, the last Sunday of the church year. The hymns are triumphant, the vestments gleam with white & gold, & we lift our voices to praise Jesus as the Lord of Lords, King of Kings, enthroned forever in glory. On the surface, everything about this day shouts victory, power, & majesty.

But as we read today's gospel, we are confronted with a startling image. The King we honour is not on a royal throne. Instead, he is hanging on a cross, crowned with thorns, his body battered & broken, mocked by those he came to save. There is no sceptre, no fanfare. There is just a dying man speaking words of forgiveness.

It's a jarring scene, especially on a day when we're supposed to celebrate Christ's reign. And yet, it's in this moment of humiliation & suffering that we find the heart of the kingdom Jesus proclaims.

Luke tells us, "When they came to the place called *The Skull*, they crucified him there with the criminals, one on his right & one on his left." And then, in the midst of his agony, Jesus says, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."

"Father, they do not know what they are doing: forgive them."

Jesus does not wait for anyone to admit their wrongdoing. He speaks mercy into a world of hatred & violence. The soldiers, the leaders, the crowd—none of them understand the gravity of what they're doing. And if we're honest, neither do we. How often do we hurt others—out of ignorance, fear, or self-interest—without fully understanding the impact? We wound those we love with careless words, & in large & small ways, we crucify each other, too.

“Father, we do not know what we are doing: forgive us.”

Forgiveness is hard. We cling to our hurts, our anger, our sense of injustice. But here we are, proclaiming Christ the King. It is not his crown of thorns, but his way of spreading his arms in love in the face of unspeakable pain. You see, Jesus forgives not out of weakness, but because *his love is stronger than his suffering*. Even at the darkest times, God's mercy flows freely.

And then, something extraordinary happens. One of the thieves hanging beside Jesus *recognizes* the way to God through Jesus. He turns to the King & says, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”

This man has nothing left but a few breaths. But out of his hopelessness, he offers this simple, desperate plea: “Remember me.”

And Jesus responds, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

This is the King speaking from the cross. He does not speak of punishment, he speaks a promise. The thief has no future to negotiate with, but Christ simply gives grace: the “paradise” of God for someone who has nothing to offer but his own brokenness.

This is the grace of the cross: forgiveness for those who haven’t earned it, mercy for those who don’t deserve it, & a place in paradise for those who trust him, even in their brokenness. Christ reigns, not by force, but by love — & his kingdom breaks into the world in that moment of compassion. *This grace is still at work today.*

In Israel & Palestine, where decades of violence have torn families apart, there are still stories of forgiveness & reconciliation. One such story I read is of Bassam Aramin, a Palestinian man whose 10-year-old daughter was killed by an Israeli soldier. Instead of seeking revenge, Bassam chose to work with Israeli families who had also lost loved ones. His life became a powerful testimony to the power of forgiveness, showing us that the kingdom of God is built on love, not violence. He chose to live *where love overcomes hate & mercy triumphs over fear.*

That is what it looks like when Christ reigns. It is not power but love; not force but mercy. Christ’s kingdom breaks through one act of mercy at a time. Christ calls us to reflect his love, to be agents of God’s grace in a world that so desperately needs it.

What would it look like if you allowed forgiveness to break into your life? Maybe it's would mean forgiving someone who has hurt you, even if they haven't asked for it. Maybe it would mean listening instead of judging, or letting go of anger you've been holding onto for too long. Maybe it means showing compassion to someone who seems impossible to love.

The kingdom of God is not far away. It is here, among us. It is near, in every act of mercy & grace we perform, in every moment we choose kindness over cruelty, forgiving when it feels impossible, loving when it makes no sense, remembering that *grace is always closer than we think*.

And so, as we close out this liturgical year & prepare for Advent, we are reminded that the reign of Christ is not a distant future event. Christ's kingdom is already breaking through, right here, right now, in the choices we make to love & forgive, living just as Christ calls us to live.

When we pray, "Your kingdom come," we are not just praying for a far-off time; we are asking for Christ's kingdom to be made real in our lives today. And that means forgiving, loving, & allowing mercy to guide us.

Christ reigns from the cross, not with power but with grace. Not by avoiding suffering, but by transforming it. And He reigns in every act of forgiveness, in every moment of compassion, & in every heart that dares to love as he loves. Amen.