

CHRIST THE KING LUTHERAN CHURCH

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CHRIST THE KING

Last Sunday after Pentecost

November 23, 2025

Jeremiah 23:1-6; Psalm 46; Colossians 1:11-20; Saint Luke 23: 33-43

In nomine Jesu!

Jesus never stops. In Luke's Gospel, *Jesus never stops* calling and gathering new disciples and enlightening those who have been around awhile. Even from the cross; even in the few seconds before breathing his last: "...today you will be with me in paradise." Even as Jesus breathes his last, the officer in charge of the execution, makes this bold confession, "Truly this man was innocent!" That makes him a new disciple too.

Jesus never stops. In fact, because *Jesus never stops* even *after* death and the grave, Luke can't even conclude Jesus' story. He needs volume 2: we call it "The Acts of the Apostles." We treat it as if it's about everyone who comes *after* Jesus. Luke knew better. In the first verse of Acts, Luke tells his friend Theophilus: "I produced an earlier treatise concerning every Jesus initiated..." Initiated - a verb choice that indicates not past action completed but ongoing activity - *Jesus never stops* calling, gathering, and enlightening disciples. Jesus never stops before the cross; and *Jesus never stops* after bursting from the tomb and after ascending to reign at the right hand of the One he calls "Abba."

Jesus never stops calling, gathering, and enlightening disciples; and what a motley crew they were! Starting with four fishers, Jesus next calls several of their Galilean neighbors - country bumpkins as the rest of Judea described them; next he calls Levi or Matthew, a tax collector from whom we will hear every Sunday starting next Sunday as we Matthew's, or one of Matthew's disciples' Gospel throughout the year.

Matthew was different from the others: more pious, more studious, more educated and because he collaborated with the Romans and ripped off his fellow Jews, more than any of Jesus' previous disciples. Afterward Jesus called Simon "the Zealot," a rabid, right-wing, prone-to-violence insurrectionist. Then there were the women, not your normal disciples back then. Luke doesn't say much about them. After these there were other followers; some formerly blind or lame or deaf or speech-impaired beggars, several more beggars; yet another Roman centurion with his personal slave; several who had been demon-possessed; a well-off, well respected member of the ruling Sanhedrin elite named Joseph from suburban Arimathea who happened to own a burial plot; and in today's Gospel, a crucified and dying insurrectionist, to whom Jesus promises Paradise; two nameless wanderers who met Jesus on their way to Emmaus, ate with him, recognized him, and hightailed it back to Jerusalem to spread the news. So far Luke's Gospel but then volume 2, where Jesus picks up seven new deacons (none named Ben); an Ethiopian Eunuch; a rabid church-hater names Saul, renamed Paul; a jailer with family, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera. As Luke tells it, *Jesus never stops* calling, gathering, and enlightening; and whether it's *before* his death or *after* his resurrection, Jesus leads every disciple to and gathers all at the cross where he serves, dies, and reigns; and defines for all what it means to call him "king" and what it means for us to find triumph in serving with him.

Jesus never stops calling and gathering disciples and that brings this to us today. 80 years ago, a group of Swedes, with Danes and other Scandinavians sprinkled among them (we Germans came later), decided that this site would be a good place for Jesus to continue calling, gathering, and enlightening disciples. So, they built a little church for Jesus' calling and gathering; then an education wing and eventually theological center

(for Jesus' enlightening); then this worship space; then that bell tower; then this signature pipe organ; -

all because they were certain that here in this place Jesus would never stop calling and gathering new disciples; and enlightening those who'd been around awhile.

We're *still* a motley crew; as diverse as the Jesus first one reported by Luke; as diverse as those Luke reports in his second volume; and a whole lot more intentionally inclusive than the places from which we and our forebears came!

We give thanks for our forebears and what they dreamt, pledged, and gave, endured, built, and sang, argued over, and laughed about for 72 years. We also give thanks for one another and especially for those who struggled, suffered, and stuck together through the last eight years of body blows together. But chiefly we give God thanks here today as they did because we know that Jesus is Christ the King and we are Christ the King's people; and Jesus never stops calling, gathering, enlightening and nourishing disciples here still; gathering us around the table and at the cross, where he reigns to serve all and enables us to know the joy of Christ's servants too.

Two more homiletic comments. The first lest at the narthex door or by email I hear from the confirmation class, or the retired pastor corps, or the future minister cadre that I have confused the persons of the Trinity. For the record, I haven't but I have deliberately used Luther's Third Article description of the work of the Holy Spirit – calling, gathering, and enlightening – to describe the ceaseless work of Jesus too. I do this on good authority following the example of Luke who consistently reports that wherever Jesus acts, the Spirit acts, and vice versa; and calls those acts "Gospel."

Second, I want to remind us once again that that right here and right now in, with, and under the Meal set before us, Jesus pours out the Spirit to gather disciples of every time and every place and from this Table addresses us in the same way he addressed that repentant insurrectionist from the cross; the same way he will address each of us when our time here is through: “Today you will be with me in Paradise” – of which this meal is a foretaste.

Jesus never stops, but I do. So, let’s all say it together: Amen.

Amandus J. Derr, Interim Senior Pastor