

The Reverend Theo Robinson's Sermon – November 23, 2025

Luke 23:33-43 – “The King's Subjects”

May only truth be spoken and may only truth be heard. Amen.

I had to double check the calendar to make sure that we were in November and not April. The passage from Luke's Gospel today sure seems like something out of the Easter season, didn't it? Today is the last Sunday of the church year and being Year C, the lectionary has landed this beauty of a reading in our laps. Although it seems out of sync with the rest of the church calendar, it is an important set of events that perhaps really does deserve a second look as we head into the season of Advent.

Not only is today the last Sunday of the liturgical calendar, it's also Christ the King Sunday. It's a celebration of the all-embracing authority of Christ as King and Lord of all things. Officially called "The Feast of Our Lord Jesus Christ the King," these festivities were instituted by Pope Pius XI in the 1920s as a way to fight the rising secularism in Europe by reminding Christian faithful that Christ must reign in our hearts, our minds, our wills, and our bodies. The feast is celebrated on the final Sunday of Ordinary Time, the Sunday before Advent.

Actually, it is quite fitting that the feast celebrating Christ's kingship is observed right before Advent, when we liturgically wait for the promised Messiah. During Eastertide, the Passion narrative emphasizes the trials, pain, and suffering that Jesus endures as he makes his way to his gruesome death. The point is to show how he suffered and died to atone for our sins and then there is the celebration of his resurrection as he is risen from the dead to be with God for all eternity. And I could talk about that again as it is important for us to remember what Jesus has done for us. Instead, let's talk about kings.

What do we know about kings? Today, the language of kingship is outmoded and sometimes offensive. There are good reasons for this. We don't live under kings, so the metaphor feels irrelevant. And we're rightly repulsed at how the reigns of kings, at times, meant a reign of terror for most subjects — massive wealth and power attained by cruelty and exploitation, which was then passed on by birthright to people who did nothing to deserve it.

Kings have become almost obsolete, a way of leading that no longer holds much of our attention, at least here in Canada and here at St Peter. But, once upon a time, Christ was hailed as king in the midst of a people who did understand kingship, and particularly Christ's kingship over them. But what kind of king was Jesus?

Each of the synoptic Gospels presents a slightly different picture of Christ as King. In Mark, Christ is Israel's true king, but his kingship is hidden in suffering and rejection. In Chapter 15, a centurion declares, "Truly this man was God's Son!" but yet Christ dies on the cross under the mocking banner "King of the Jews."

In Matthew, Jesus is the God-authorized Son and Israel's Messiah who teaches with heavenly authority concerning the will of God and performs miracles that give authority to his teachings. Jesus as King in Matthew is, in the words that both open and close his gospel, "God with us".

In Luke, Jesus is the Son of a God who, through Jesus' ministry, grants forgiveness of sins to the repentant and the gift of salvation through the bestowal of the Holy Spirit. In today's Gospel reading, three times Jesus is mentioned as king: by the soldiers at the cross in verse 37 "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!", on the inscription nailed to the cross in verse 38 "This is the King of the Jews", and by the criminal asking to be remembered when Jesus comes into his kingdom in verse 42.

But really, Jesus wasn't a king, nor did he want to be. Jesus was sent to us to teach us how to love. He didn't ask for worshipers and wasn't looking to start a new religion. He wasn't asking anyone to call him "your majesty" or to fall to their knees before him. Wealth and fame meant nothing to him. I mean c'mon! The guy rode to his death on the back of a donkey! No luxurious horse or carriage to be seen. At no time did Jesus claim to be a king. He was certainly a leader, a great leader, but he was not a king. In fact, he reflected that question back at Pilate in Luke's chapter 23 verse 3:

"Then Pilate asked him, 'Are you the king of the Jews?'

He answered, 'You say so.'"

Jesus was mockingly labelled as the King of the Jews and ridiculed by the crowds, the soldiers, and even the criminals hanging from their own crosses next to Jesus. Everyone mocked him, asking why as King and Messiah, he didn't save himself. The crowds were furious because they believed that if Jesus wouldn't save himself how on earth could he save the people of Jerusalem? But Jesus does not come down off his cross to prove his supposedly kingly status. Instead, he remains on that instrument of torture and humiliation as a representative of all who suffer unjustly. And he does not promise a better tomorrow but instead offers to redeem us today.

Jesus was not sent to rule the people of Israel and all the earth. Jesus was sent to be a teacher...a mentor...a leader...to show us how to love ourselves and how to love one another in order to find peace. Peace and reconciliation for all of creation are signs of the kingdom of God in Jesus.

I found a poem that I would like to read to you. It is by Alyce M. McKenzie.

What kind of King is this? Who is crucified at a place called the Skull?

With a criminal on his left and a criminal on his right?

What kind of king is this who forgives rather than executes judgment on those who contest his power?

What kind of king is this? Who allows himself to be disrespected and abused without speaking a word in his own defense?

What kind of king is this who allows even criminals to mock him without putting them in their place?

What kind of king is this whose thoughts are on others rather than his own pain at the peak of his own undeserved suffering?

How can a crucified king bring us life?

How can a forgiving king right the wrongs done to us and that we have done to others?

How can a peaceful king end the wars that rage within us and around us?

How can a compassionate king find the strength to lead us?

From the very beginnings of all the gospels, the "the kingdom" is proclaimed repeatedly. It is clearly more than a metaphor. It is a state of mind. It is a destination. Whether it will reside above the clouds, beyond the stars, in our hearts or, most likely, in a dimension well beyond our current comprehension: Christ's kingdom will come. Jesus will reign in love and peace and serenity: King of Kings, Lord of Lords. That's the kind of king we have. The question now becomes – what kind of subjects will we be?

Can you feel how the world has changed this year? Over the last few years? Can you feel the tension growing, the fear? Stories of racist graffiti spray-painted on Mosques, Synagogues, churches, and schools. Governments working to remove access to gender-affirming care and safe spaces for the transgender community. People being taken from their homes and places of work to be deported to their country of origin. Shelters for the unhoused being torn down without a plan to help the people affected.

Are these the types of subjects the Jesus wants? I highly doubt it. Now more than ever we need to listen to the Gospels and take to heart Jesus' emphasis on loving all people, not just a select few. No one person or group or ethnicity is better than any others. We are all human. We are all God's creation. And we all have the right to exist, to have beliefs, to love, and to be loved. That's the kind of subjects we need to be. If we are calling Jesus our king and he is the king of love and kindness, then as his subjects, we are meant to be the givers of love and kindness, as it is through love and kindness that we will reveal the existence of Jesus' kingdom here on earth.

Amen.