

# Sermon Text for November 24, 2019

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Jeremiah 23:1-6, Luke 23:33-43

**“Not the kind of kingdom that you would expect.”**

We find ourselves today in Christ the King Sunday which is the last Sunday of our liturgical year. Our liturgical year begins in Advent, so next Sunday is the first Sunday of Advent and the first Sunday in our liturgical calendar. It happens to be the first Sunday in December, but that is not normal. Usually the first Sunday in Advent is in November.

As a result of us ending our year this week and beginning our year next week we are going to take a break in Acts but we are still going to be reading from the same author as the one who wrote Acts, so that would be Luke. We are going to be looking at what are called Lectionary texts. People much smarter than me got together and plan out a cycle for preaching where you over time cover the entire Scripture more or less.

Most mainstream churches and their pastors choose to preach through the lectionary, these pre-selected Scriptures, but you happen to be stuck with a pastor who instead of following the lectionary, follows his own lection continuo which means he takes a book of the Bible and stays with it until it is exhausted which normally happens much later than when the people are exhausted of it.

So today we begin a season in the lectionary. Christ the King Sunday allows us to look at Scripture which provides us with a hope and expectation that Jesus will be coming back again. When Jesus comes back he will return as king and he will establish his kingdom. Now keep in mind that when Jesus our Savior first came he was a king and he told us what his kingdom ought to look like and he gave us all the tools that we need, beginning with the Holy Spirit to work in order to establish His kingdom here on earth which he expects our daily lives to reflect. We talk a lot in this church about the kingdom of God, our role in establishing it, and what it ought to reflect and who it ought to emulate.

But the kingdom we find depicted in Scripture is very different from the kingdom, the nation state, the rule that we would expect. We would expect a king to reign with unmitigated power as opposed to relational authority. We expect today a king to rule with arrogance as opposed to the humility found before us in the Scripture that we will read. We expect a king to focus on financial dominance as opposed to a Matthew 25 kingdom where the king wants to

know what have we done for the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, those without clothes, the sick, and those in prison.

Today we are going to see a kingdom that we would not expect but for which we ought to hope because Scripture tells us it is coming.

## **READ**

In Jeremiah we find before us a pretty bleak picture of the kingdom that is currently at hand in the nation of Israel. The leaders of that day cared more for their own interests and their own gains as opposed to the needs of the people. Many have said that Jeremiah 23 could have been written today as the imminent arrest of Netanyahu looms on the horizon.

There is a warning in Jeremiah for those placed in charge of the kingdom that if they scatter the sheep and divide them they will face a pretty harsh judgment. That was the reality in Scripture but then he transitions in vs.3 and says because your rulers have turned their backs on you for their own self-interest and for their own political and monetary gains then I myself will come and reign over you. He establishes a hope that one day a king will come who will allow the people to live without fear and without division because currently the people were scattered and polarized and they made their decisions based on fear.

When that happens, then, God says, I will come and establish my kingdom. But what does this kingdom look like? He states in these verses that a defining aspect of this kingdom will be look starting at vs.3, they will be fruitful and multiply, it goes on in vs.4, they shall fear no longer, or be dismayed. They will have someone over them who will be called “The Lord is our righteousness.”

So what will be our role in this kingdom? Will we just be the recipients of this kingdom and not have a role? Every Sunday we pray: Thy kingdom come, thy will be done. We ask habitually for God’s kingdom to come but I’m wondering if some of us know what type of kingdom Scripture depicts as coming with the coming of Christ. I wonder if we would hesitate to pray Thy kingdom come when we find out what God’s kingdom is like, because it is not the type of kingdom we would expect.

Our Gospel lectionary text is in Luke and it speaks a lot about the kingdom and specifically that type of kingdom that our Jesus represented when he was upon this earth. We begin chapter 23 at the very beginning in vs.3 with Pilate asking Jesus: So you are a king? And

it is that question which frames all which comes next as he is stripped and beaten and crucified as a self-professed king. You have said so. He did not deny that he was a king.

If you go to John 18 you see a long exchange where Jesus professes to be a king but not of this world. So Jesus, what does your kingdom look like because the way things are going your kingdom is not at all what we would expect. As we skip ahead we find ourselves at Jesus' crucifixion. At the top of every cross there were written in all languages so that all people could understand the heinous crimes these people committed, the charge against the person being crucified. They were written on wooden tablets above the crosses.

Jesus' charges said INRI, Jesus Christ King of the Jews. It was a final mocking statement which was picked up by the religious leaders in this Scripture: If you are king, save yourself. It is picked up by the soldiers: If you are a king then come off that cross and save yourself. It is picked up by one of the prisoners on his side: If you are king then save yourself and while you are at it, save us too.

Jesus called King of the Jews on his cross was a mockery. It wasn't a nod to history, it was all those present, the crowd, the religious leaders, the soldiers, and one of the thieves making fun of this king. None of these people could understand from where he got his authority for it seemed like it had no power, at least not the type of power we expect a king to have. But we should know better. We should know the difference between a Jeremiah king who seeks after his own benefit at the expense of his people and a suffering servant King which the prophet Isaiah describes.

A suffering servant. In my experience as pastor I have had the privilege of being the pastor of hundreds of state department civil servants. From first year people to ambassadors and Deputy Chief of Missions and Military Attaches. Each of them that I have known served as servants because they loved their country and are incredible patriots, what some would call great Americans. Phil Skottie who preached here and was in charge of all the American service centers in all the embassies across the world is one of them. Today he serves as an ambassador.

It pains me to see them testifying knowing the backlash that they will receive as a result. Knowing the names they will be called. They are servants. And the ones I knew who were members of my church were pursuing the kingdom of God that I see depicted in Scripture. It was a kingdom based upon justice and righteousness. In fact, as a result of our work together my

name made it into Wiki Leaks because of our work sponsored by the State Department and the US Embassy in Moscow to provide a safe haven for people of color living in Russia.

So what does God's kingdom look like? Matthew 25 tells us clearly. Jesus is king, but not the type of king you would expect today. Jesus is the type of king whose first act as he arrived at the cross was to forgive his accusers, not those who were on his side and visibly supported him. We find in Jesus someone who is challenged to save himself three times and instead chooses to save a criminal next to him who expresses a desire to be with him in his kingdom.

There is a part of me that is grateful for the very clear divide that we find in our culture today because it is a divide which allows us to choose if we are going to see God's kingdom as one of arrogance and egotism and power or one where justice and righteousness is pursued where the king cares more about what we have done for the hungry, the thirsty, the immigrant, those without clothes, the sick, those in prison, than a king who desires to be served.

As we celebrate Christ the King today do not conflate our traditional and cultural understanding of what makes a strong king with what Scripture shows us is our king and the one to whom we show our primary allegiance. The one hanging on a cross, ridiculed and didn't strike back but rather forgave. That is our king and his kingdom reflects our desire to follow this good shepherd. Amen.