

Christ Our King

Christ The King Sunday

November 25, 2007

Jer 23:1-6, Ps 46, Col 1:11-20, Luke 23:23-43

Preached by Scott Jones

There's a story of about a group of young evangelists working the crowd in airport. They were running around handing out tracks, asking people if they were saved. They came to a distinguished old African-American gentleman, half coming out of a nap while waiting for his flight. The young evangelist asked the man pointedly, "Are you saved?!?" The old man looked a bit confused and responded, "Yeah, I suppose so, you mean Jesus and all that? Yeah I'm saved." The young evangelist didn't let up, he said "Well sir, do you know exactly when you were saved?!?" The old man, a bit more awake but still seemingly a bit confused responded, "Yeah, I think it was about 2,000 years ago." That's not bad theology. It's Christ the King Sunday sort of theology. Because you see the reason we celebrate Christ the King Sunday, really the reason we gather here every Sunday if you think about it, is because we believe something definitive happened two-thousand years ago in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, something that shapes the world more profoundly than any other event since. It was in the events of 2000 years ago that we here believe and confess that Jesus was revealed as the lord of all and the king of kings. It was and it is in HIM that we've been created. It's in Him we're held together. It is in HIM we've rescued and transferred from the power of darkness and transferred in the Kingdom of His beloved Son. It is through King Jesus that God was please to reconcile us by making peace with us through the cross.

But his kingship is not revealed in the normal manner of worldly kings. No men in tights with rolling parchments and brass horns. No fancy coronations. No pomp and circumstance. No this king's exaltation comes through his humiliation. He is the King who wins battles through surrender and suffering. He is the king who rules not by force but by love. He is the king whose greatest moment is in his humiliation, and whose Kingdom and power and glory can only be received through humility. Pride will certainly not inherit it.

We must keep in mind, however, that there are two types of pride. There's the type of pride that leads to esteeming one's self too highly. This is perhaps the most familiar form. But there is another more insidious form. It's the form that says "I'm a special case...I'm so bad, so sinful, so full of shame, that I can't be redeemed." That's the more debilitating form of pride. The one that convinces someone that they are the only one in the universe beyond the scope and reach of God's miraculous love and grace. It's the kind that most often keeps us from coming under the rule of the cosmic King. Bishop Oscar Romero was famous for his prayer: "I can't, you must, I'm yours, show me the way..." That's the prayer that loyal subjects of the King pray with regularity. Will you take the words of Jesus more seriously than your own words? Will you take His word for it when you feel

like your destiny seems like anything but paradise, as I'm sure the thief on the cross in our Gospel reading must have felt? Will you take His word more seriously than other words when your life seems more like a foretaste of hell than heaven? In those moments will you allow yourself to hear the King's Word about yourself, the royal pronouncement of the King?

Lloyd Oglivie, former chaplain of the U.S. Senate used to say: "Without God we can't, without us, God won't". This is what happens when you come under the rule of the king: he invites you to participate in the spreading and advancement of his kingdom. The king pours his life and power and grace into you, that those things might spill forth from you into the world that does not yet know who and whose it is.

I once heard a story about a pastor of a church on the Upper East Side. He would go every day to a restaurant and have doughnuts and coffee. He did that every day for two months. He realized that the same people were there every morning. So one morning he stood up and said, "Excuse me everybody, but I've been coming in here every day for two months at 6:30 in the morning. It's the same people here every day and I don't know anyone! Would you please stand up and introduce yourselves and tell us who you are and what you do?" Well, they went around. It was a virtual who's who. Bill Cosby's wife was there and Tom Wolfe, the author. It went on and on. Everybody introduced themselves, everybody said what they were doing.

The atmosphere changed and there was a real comradeship created in the place. People would come in and say, "Hi Gordon! Hi Ralph! Hi Bill!" They knew about everybody except the man who ran the place. His name was Harry. They ganged up on him one day and said, "Harry, we don't know anything about you. Where are you from? Do you have a family?" He didn't want to answer. Finally they pressed him and said, "You have to answer!" He said, "Alright. If you have to know, my name is not Harry. It's Haseem." A dead silence fell over the crowd. He said, "I'm from Iraq. My family is in Bagdad even now!" And he said it with anger because the war was just about to break out. Everybody hunkered down and finished their coffee and doughnuts and got out of there.

The next morning at 5:30, the telephone rang. My friend picked up the phone and answered it. The voice at the other end said, "Ralph, have you been listening to the radio?" He said, "No." The man said, "The bombing of Bagdad has begun!" Without hesitation, he hung up the phone, he rushed to the cable car that would take him over to Manhattan, he came down the steps, and he ran over to the coffee shop. To his absolute amazement, at quarter to six in the morning everyone who had coffee in that shop in the morning had already arrived. They wanted to be there when Harry arrived—when Haseem arrived—at six o'clock. When Haseem turned the corner and saw them, he was amazed. They ran up, encircled him, and they wept and cried with him. Finally, Tom Wolfe said, "Alright, alright. Ralph, you're the preacher. Pray!"

Ralph said, "I stood there on the corner. Here I am a Baptist preacher praying for a Muslim with some Jewish people and some agnostics standing around praying with me. When we finished the prayer, I looked up and tears were streaming down Haseem's face

who then said, ‘Alright. Alright. But you still have to pay for the doughnuts!’ And then he added, ‘But from now on, my friends, and you are my friends, the coffee in this place will always be free!’ My friend Ralph said, ‘As I held a doughnut in one hand and a cup of coffee in the other, I wondered if I had ever been at the communion table in church with such an awesome awareness of the presence of God.’

The king invites us to be changed through his Word and to be transformers of His world. Thanks be to God. Amen.