

The Christ The King?? Matthew 27:27-31

Today is “Christ The King” Sunday, the last Sunday of the church year. Most festival days in the church calendar celebrate things that happened in the past: Christmas, Easter, Transfiguration Sunday, and All Saints Day. But on Christ the King Sunday, we celebrate something that will happen in the future: the return of Jesus and God’s creation of a new heavens and a new earth. That will be a day of rejoicing for believers, when we finally see with our eyes what we have believed in our hearts: that Jesus **is** Lord of the universe, and that we who have placed our faith in Him will reign with him throughout eternity. That being the case, we might expect the Gospel reading for today to describe Jesus in all His glory and majesty. Something like we find in Daniel 7 where Daniel was shown that the day would come when one like a son of man, will come with clouds of heaven and will be given authority, glory and sovereign power, and all peoples, nations and men of every language will worship him and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed. Now that sounds like a king in his glory! But instead of a description of Jesus being glorified, we have a description of him being humiliated as he is mocked and abused by Pilate’s soldiers. Far from being worshipped as the king of heaven and earth, he was treated as the refuse of humanity. Shunned even by his own disciples, he would have spikes driven through his wrists and ankles into a wooden cross, then raised up and left to die slowly of pain, shock and suffocation. Sometimes it took two or three days for someone who had been crucified to die. But before Jesus was taken out to be crucified, he was tortured. The Praetorian guard—the most brutal soldiers of the Roman Garrison in Jerusalem—took Jesus into their barracks to play what they called the “King’s game” with him—a game the soldiers liked to play with criminals who were about to be executed. The King’s game was a sadistic parody of a real coronation in which the victim was stripped, dressed in purple rags, had a twisted corona of briars driven into his scalp and then was insulted, spat upon and bludgeoned until he was senseless. While this was going on, the soldiers would place bets with each other over how long the victim would last before he passed out. Even from a distance of two thousand years we are inclined to view this spectacle with the same skepticism as the soldiers and ask: *“is this a king??”*

Was Jesus a king while he was being beaten and spat upon and cursed? Or did he only become a king later when he was glorified? At this point he appeared to be a total washout and his claims to royalty a pathetic joke. Common sense would tell you that he was either a liar or a lunatic, or perhaps both. Yet we know by faith, by the Word of God, and by the evidence of fulfilled prophecy that Jesus was **and is** the Son of God and The King of Creation.

And so we're left with only one possible conclusion: what our powers of observation and reason tell us is not necessarily the truth—especially when it comes to Jesus. The only absolute truth we have is God's Word and His Word trumps all other claims to truth—including the claims of reason.

Reason tells us that a king should be clothed in trappings of power and majesty rather than a purple rag and a crown of thorns. Reason tells us that a king rules over his subjects and is not ruled by them. Reason tells us that soldiers should be loyal to their king and not treat him with contempt. In other words, reason tells us that what happened to Jesus was the opposite of what should happen to a king. But then Jesus said and did a lot of things that didn't seem reasonable. He fed thousands of people on five loaves of bread and two fish. He said that in his kingdom, the last would be first and the first would be last and whoever would be Lord of all must be the slave of all and that little children could understand things that were unfathomable to the wise and learned.. With Jesus, truth often defied reason. Humble service was more desirable than high command. Self-denial would bring joy and self-indulgence would bring grief. The slave rules the master and the least is the greatest. With Jesus, the meek would inherit creation and the way of the cross would supersede paths of glory. All these things are unreasonable and can be grasped only by faith. But with Jesus, faith trumps reason. By faith, Jesus was not only a King: he was the King of Kings. And the King of Kings was lowly and humble, a man of sorrows who came to serve rather than to be served. The King of Kings washed His followers' feet and submitted to the insults and blows of His enemies. The King of Kings loved His enemies, forgave those who tortured Him, and died for those who crucified Him. This was the way of the King of Kings and that is the way of His Kingdom.

To see the difference between His Kingdom and the kingdom of this world requires nothing more than a half-hour in front of your television set. There you will have your carnal desires encouraged, your appetites inflamed and your vanity fed. You will be told that "you are worth it" in a hundred different ways. You will be told that happiness lies in material possessions rather than spiritual riches, in eternal youth rather than mature judgment, in a new hair-do rather than a crown of thorns, and in a pornotopia of sensual delights. In short, you will be offered the way of the world rather than the way of the Cross. And every single word you hear will be a lie. That is why Jesus said clearly and unmistakably, "My Kingdom is not of this world."

Several years ago, Karen and I took a trip to France. While we were there, we visited the Palace of Versailles, which is regarded as one of the most beautiful buildings in the world. Outside, the palace is surrounded by perfectly manicured lawns and gardens and inside all its rooms are filled with sculptures and famous paintings.

It was like the prince's castle you imagined when you read *Cinderella* as a child. As we were going through the palace we came to one of its most famous parts: the hall of mirrors. I had never seen so many mirrors—one after another and all encased in golden frames studded with precious gems. But as we moved on I noticed that there were mirrors all through the palace. The palace had been built by King Louis the 14th, who was called "Louis The Great" or "The Sun King," He reigned in France from 1648 – 1710—seventy-two years during which France was the dominant power in continental Europe. Louis resided in the palace of Versailles and from all the mirrors it appears that when he wasn't conducting affairs of state, he was wandering through its rooms and hallways, gazing at his reflection in mirrors and reveling in his magnificence. His glory could be reflected everywhere he went.

And it made me think that this world is a lot like the palace of Versailles. We wander through it seeing things that are pleasing to our eyes and seeking things that will reflect our glory. The super-rich seem to be especially prone to this disease. Some years back, at an art auction at Sotheby's one person paid 750 thousand dollars for a dead artist's underwear, another paid 1.3 million dollars for a picture of the Pink Panther embracing a porn star, and another paid 1.5 million dollars for a porcelain urinal. Things like that make you wonder just how far civilization has actually progressed. Or maybe it's what H. L. Mencken said: that art was really a conspiracy between artists and the rich to make the rest of us feel stupid. In any case, it vividly illustrates what Jesus said about how God has hidden his wisdom from the wise and learned and given it instead to little children. I can't think of a single child who would spend a penny of his allowance for used underwear or a urinal. This world is a palace of smoke and mirrors and the more of our time and money we invest in it; the more we become convinced that it is the ultimate reality. After all, it is ruled by one whom Jesus calls "the father of lies," the master of illusion, the con man. If we trust in his lies we will follow him down a path which seems right but whose end is death. It's an attractive path, paved with seductive promises, but it's smoke and mirrors and don't you ever forget it! Only by following the Real King, whose Word is Truth, can we find love, joy peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control—in this world and in the next. It is not the wide and easy way: it is the narrow way. There are no smoke or mirrors along the way--only truth. This is the true King's way, the King who said, "Anyone who would come after me must first deny himself, take up his cross and follow me." And knowing how undisposed by nature we are to do that and how vulnerable we are to the snares and traps of our clever enemy, he added a wonderful promise: "come to me all you who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." Believe it my friends believe it! Only if we walk by faith, letting the Word of God light our way, will we enter through the narrow gate into the Kingdom of God where The True King reigns. And there we will rule with Him forever. Amen.