

Luke 23:33-43

Reign of Love

We began our worship with the singing of *Lo, how a rose e're blooming*. Most often sung during the Christmas season it speaks to the one we are celebrating today as King of our lives on this Reign of Christ Sunday. This Sunday marks the end of the Christian calendar year. Next week with the season of Advent we launch into a new cycle of living and learning. Advent brings the story of the anticipation of the Messiah and the birth of Christ. Today we celebrate that Christ has lived among human beings, remember that he died at the hands of power and politics, and by God's power was raised up, and lives among us, move among us, breathes in us in the power of the Holy Spirit.

This is a joyful day and yet our scripture reading is about the death of Jesus on a cross. Hardly seems the way to celebrate and exult the life of a King. Think of it. In our own time we are going to witness the coronation of King Charles. We know it will be a time of pomp and ceremony. The money going into that day from security, to food, to paper, and whatever else you may be able to imagine, is a number I can't even begin to imagine.

Yet here, in the story of Christ the King, we find violence, death, insults, pain and suffering. The inscription said "King of the Jews". It was a mockery. It wasn't intended to do anything but make fun of the one who claimed to have a kingdom of his own. What kind of King has no wealth, no status, no power, well at least not in the mind and experience of human beings. For us, kings and kingdoms have power, might, strength, money, influence, and prestige.

The King Christians claim has none of that, at least not in the way that may seem to have meaning in a world that sees power, wealth, popularity, and influence as important and necessary. This king that we Christian's claim is sung about as a Rose, tender, arriving in the middle of the night, no fanfare.

This life with its humble beginning also ended in a powerless sight. Clothes were divided because this seeming criminal would not need them. Leaders scoffed saying, "He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!" Please hear their words oozing with sarcasm. He was mocked by soldiers offering him sour wine, and saying "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!"

Put yourself in the scene listening to those around you who are laughing and joking as Jesus is hanging there suffering. Then there are the two hanging there with him. One criminal joins in with the others, "Are you not the Messiah! Save yourself and us!" There may have been a little hope there, but really, he was likely just angry, scared, and lashing out.

Then there is the other who hangs on a cross with them. Remember this is not an easy death. It is slow and suffocating. This one person alone sees something, experiences something, notices. We really don't know what he senses or why he speaks as he does, but his words to the other criminal speak to the guilty verdict they have received, and that though there is good reason for them to be there on a cross, the other with them, Jesus, is innocent. "He has done nothing wrong. Then he said, Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

So today we are here as Christians. But what difference does it make? Are we here just like any other service organization? Do we come because of the community of people? Is it a safe space for you? Is it tradition?

It may be that you feel all of that applies, and it is good if it does, but the life of a Christian is marked by the same characteristics that Jesus modeled and lived, taught about and did. He healed, he loved, he forgave, then he promised that we would be with him in Paradise.

We often think of that paradise as the place we go after we die. Heaven. And it is that, but it is so much more. Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise." For God, time and day is not the same as for you and I. Today is now. We don't have to wait until we die to experience the love of Christ, the grace of God, and the power of the Holy Spirit. We live into this today.

As we consider this, I would like you to reach back into your memories and think of a time that you experienced holiness. A moment when you thought, God is here. God is with me. A time that felt sacred, like you knew there was more going on than what was in front of you.

One of the moments for me was when I was preaching for the search committee of St. Andrew's. I had been put up at the Prince Arthur Hotel. Rev. Hunt made sure to request a room that had a view of the Nanabijou, also known as the Sleeping Giant. He could not have known what that would come to mean for me. I had met with the search committee and toured St. Andrew's. There was something about this place. I had interviewed and toured other churches by this time. But as I went to sleep that night, or tried to sleep I should say, I ended up just sitting at the window looking out at the Giant. My chest was warm and I could hardly speak. When I went to preach the next day at Lakeview, I was afraid that no words would come from my mouth as my chest continued to radiate warmth. It was like the very presence of God was with me. I knew before I preached, that if St. Andrew's would have me, I would say yes.

These moments don't come always or often, yet they can sustain us. They remind us that there is a kingdom that is not of this world. It is a kingdom that is present, holds us. It is a kingdom of holiness, love, hope, joy, peace, and grace. It is not one of earthly power, but power that goes beyond our circumstances. It is power that enables us to reach out to others with love and grace. Christ's reign, God's kingdom is one that is marked by love, deep love for God, for ourselves, and for others. Not just the others we

like, but others who are not at all like us. This reign of love includes and especially remembers the destitute, the forgotten, the downtrodden.

It is a kingdom where people are valued regardless of colour, gender, or social or economic standing. It is a kingdom where the subjects extend love and honour to anyone and everyone. It is a kingdom where justice prevails for all, not just for some. This is what we celebrate today on this Reign of Christ Sunday. We celebrate and claim the power of Christ to transform us and the world. We live it out, sharing it with others, experiencing the holiness that is the practice of love and grace, forgiveness and hope, justice and peace.

God's kingdom is now. Christ's reign is now. We are God's people remembered in love yesterday, today, and in the days to come. Jesus remembers us, stands with us, loves us and lives in us. Thanks be to God for this reign of love.