

King of Glory Lutheran Church

Pastor Ruth Ann Loughry November 22-23, 2025

Year C: Christ the King Luke 23:33-43 The Savior we Need

Happy New Year's Eve! What in November? Yes indeed! I was telling a friend the text for this weekend and she said, "Don't we usually hear that story around Easter?" Yes we do. It's out of context to hear the story of Jesus' crucifixion now and not at the end of Lent. It seems upside down. Out of place. Like Christmas in July. Good Friday in November.

We've come to the end of the church year. In the church year, Advent is the first season and it fixes our eyes on Jesus' upcoming birth. The orchestra violins are just off stage, warming up to play, "Joy to the World." Next weekend is the beginning of Advent.

So today, is like the end of a season of your favorite TV show. There's been 24 episodes and the season is over. In the church at the end of the season, we get new episodes, but the same story. We're on a three year cycle of Bible readings just finishing year C, when we've heard of Jesus' life primarily from the Gospel of Luke. Year A comes next in 2026 as we focus on Matthew's perspective. Year B, gives us Mark's lens of who Jesus was.

The title for this weekend is Christ the King. As we just heard, Jesus' is hanging on the cross with a sign above His head reading, "King of the Jews." Really? When we think of kings, we think red carpet. Crowns of jewels. We think motorcades and nobles waving from behind protective glass or high balconies.

That's not the case here. Soldiers are gambling for Jesus' clothes. People are taunting Him. "You're the King? Save yourself! We'd love to see that!" This is an execution of horrendous proportion. Jesus is hanging bloodied and exhausted upon a wooden cross.

The movie "42" tells the story of baseball great Jackie Robinson and owner Branch Rickey who hired him. Branch is interviewing Jackie – deciding if he wants to sign him. Jackie asks Branch, "You want a player **who doesn't have the guts to fight back?**" Branch replies, "No, I want a player **with the guts to *not* fight back.**"

We know the rest of the story, the Brooklyn Dodgers got the player they didn't *want*. They got the player they *needed*; a suffering servant who took them on to glory.

The people, the disciples and Jesus' family didn't want Him to die on the cross. They didn't understand and were hoping for a true King – one who would rise up to fight back against Rome. They wanted peace for their people and with their neighbors. They didn't get the King they *wanted*. Jesus was the King they *needed*.

Jesus was God with the guts to not fight back. He was faithful to the end. In that weakness was power. As we heard in the Colossians text; “For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, ²⁰and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.”

Let's move in closer and listen in to understand this “King of the Jews.” ‘Father, forgive them. They don't know what they're doing.’ As His life hangs in balance, Jesus, the King forgives. He pardons human sin. Imagine the spiritual fortitude and maturity it took to be able to utter those words. They've nailed your body, pierced it with pain, and still He says, ‘Forgive them.’

Secondly, Jesus endures mockery. Our United States nobles, our famous have to endure the paparazzi. Cameras trying to get the best angle, the shot that will sell, the picture that tells the story. This King must bear not only that they are killing Him; he must withstand the pain that people still do not understand His very presence on earth. Just a few days ago, the streets were lined with those shouting His praises. Now they torture Him with jeers. ‘If's He's the Messiah, let Him save himself!’ What they never realize is the truth of their words.

Thirdly, Jesus the King is saving. Two criminals hang also, one on each side. There is a stark difference between the two. One joins in the crowds taunts. The other though, recognizes Jesus' innocence and in quiet repentance asks for salvation. Somehow, this criminal comprehends Jesus' saving power. Christ's answer says it all. ‘Today, you'll be with me in Paradise.’ Salvation has come.

This is the King we need. One who forgives, One who endures all that we've endured, and One who saves us.

Many of us will make New Year's resolutions come January 1st.

But on this New Year's Eve, I want us to cling to the resolutions Jesus gives to us.

“Forgive them, they don't know what they're doing.” Truth be told, most days, perhaps we're not certain we know what we're doing either. That doesn't mean we don't know what we need to do. It means, somewhere between good intentions, and faith in God, comes the real world. Try as we might to love ourselves and love our neighbors, words get spoken that don't convey what we mean and people get

hurt unintentionally. Pride gets caught in power and the mission's objective gets lost. Things are done and left undone. Realizing our sin, we cry, "My goodness, God, I don't know what I'm doing!" That precisely, is where our King meets us. "You are forgiven."

And then we join with the ones who taunt and jeer and sneer. Instead of standing up for the innocent, instead of speaking out for the vulnerable, instead of walking beside the lost; well, it's just easier to be on the sidelines with the crowd. It takes so much strength to be weak! The easier path is among the mob, chanting. Sitting with those who cry takes energy. Helping the helpless takes patience. Feeding the hungry takes commitment. Here's the Good News. Jesus showed us how. This King knelt to wash feet. He wiped away tears. Christ turned the other cheek and taught us how. He promises to give us power to serve in His name. What a King!

And when we realize the depths of our situation, when the light rises upon our sin, we like the criminal recognize and confess our need for God. Jesus promises, He resolves that nothing can separate us from His presence. Not this day or any day. Today, salvation has come to you. Today.

There are times in life when we may want another Savior. We want a God that stops all harm and cures all disease and makes us rich or ... We don't get the Savior we want, we have the King we need. Jesus forgives, He endures all the pain we endure and He promises salvation. "Today, this day," Jesus says, "you are with me in Paradise." Amen