

CHRIST THE KING SUNDAY

First German Evangelical Lutheran Church

Look at Your King

Matthew 27:27-31

Then the governor's soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole company of soldiers around him.²⁸ They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him,²⁹ and then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand and knelt in front of him and mocked him. "Hail, king of the Jews!" they said.³⁰ They spit on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again.³¹ After they had mocked him, they took off the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him.

What does a king look like? What words would you use to describe a great ruler? Here's a description one historian gave of one of the world's greatest kings: "*He was an exceptionally handsome man who set a fashion for the clean-shaven look. Although he was a heavy drinker, his health was excellent and he was very athletic. He enjoyed reading, music, and the theater. He was intensely loyal to his friends and the men he led. And he was, of course, a brilliant general.*" Who is this man? Alexander the Great. By the time he was 23 years old, he had conquered most of the then-known world. Most historians would classify him as one of the greatest, if not *the* greatest king of all time. He certainly fits the part: handsome, strong, intelligent, fierce, brilliant general... That's the kind of ruler that most people like to see.

Now take that description of Alexander and contrast it with the prophet Isaiah's description of the Christ: "*He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.*" This does not sound like the description of a great king. Yet, today we celebrate Christ the King Sunday. And so this morning it is good for us to reflect on this question: What makes Jesus such a great king? As we look at today's Gospel account of Jesus being mocked and beaten, we realize that he

is not the kind of king that most people want, yet he is exactly the kind of king that we need.

The section of Matthew's gospel we have for our reading is just a small part of the whole agonizing ordeal that was Jesus' final hours before his crucifixion. By the time he is led into the Praetorium by the Roman soldiers, he has already been thoroughly and publicly humiliated. From the time he was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane, he has been led around the city of Jerusalem like a dog on a chain. He was first taken before the Jewish council for their mockery of a trial. While he was there, not only did he face the insults of the Jewish leaders, but also the physical abuse of those who struck him on the head again and again. From the Jewish council, he was led to Pontius Pilate. From Pilate, he was dragged up to Herod and back again. When he arrives back before Pilate, he is then ordered to be flogged in order to appease the crowds. It is only after this inhumane and brutal treatment that he is led into the Praetorium for the humiliating scene we witness today.

Matthew says that the whole company of soldiers gathered around him. This gruesome play was to have a large audience. And after the crowd was in place, the soldiers shoved a crown of thorns into Jesus' head, placed a robe around him and stuck a staff into his hand. This probably thought this was a pretty funny sight. This man had claimed to be a king and look at him now. He is so weak. He is so disgusting. They continued their mockery by bowing down before him and crying out, "Hail, King of the Jews!" Then they spit on him. This is probably the most degrading thing one human being can do to another. And if that wasn't enough, they took the staff from his hand and beat him with it again and again. All the while this is happening, you can just hear the laughter and the taunts of the soldiers crowded around him.

Throughout this whole ordeal, Jesus looked like such a failure to so many people. The Jews of his day saw Jesus as a failure. They had pinned all their hopes on him coming to power and ruling as the great Messiah. But it was clear that he would never be the king they wanted. They thought him a total failure. The Roman soldiers must have also seen Jesus as quite a failure. There was a scare that the Jesus could be powerful enough to cause a threat to the empire. Yet, he proved to be a weak and pitiful pretender to the throne. There was no worry for the great Caesar that this Jesus would cause him a threat—especially not in the condition they saw him now. Who could possibly see him as a king?

Do you ever look at Jesus and see him as a failure? It might not be something we want to admit, but I think it happens. We are especially tempted to do this when we face difficult situations in our lives—times of great stress and pain. One reaction that is common is to question God’s power to help us. We question God: “If you really are the great King of Kings, why don’t you help me out? How could you let me lose my job? How could you let my marriage fall apart? How could you let me get sick at a time like this?” When the chips are down, it is tempting for us to look at Jesus and see him as a failure. And when we do, when we see Jesus as a failure in our life, it is time for some new eyes. It is time to quit looking at God through the shortsighted eyes of our own selfishness. It is time to see Jesus for the king he really is.

The humiliation of Jesus as he is mocked and ridiculed by the Roman soldiers is not a sign of weakness. It is actually a sign of his strength. The weak thing for Jesus to do at this time would have been to strike these soldiers down with his almighty power. That was a certainly a possibility. There were no ropes that were strong enough to bind Jesus if he has chosen to make full use of his power to escape the abuse he was experiencing. Jesus showed his strength in the fact that he endured such ridicule even though he didn’t have to. This was the strength of his love. He knew that the only way to save you and me from an eternity in hell was to willingly suffer and die as a payment for our sins. In the last verse of our text we read, “*Then they led him away to crucify him.*” This humiliation was only a prelude to the true test of Jesus’ strength, which he would face on the cross.

When you look at Jesus with the scarlet robe and the crown of thorns, you don’t see a weak and pathetic figure. You see the greatest king that ever lived. He gave up his power. He gave up his glory. He was willing to suffer and die. And he did this because he loves you. You could have no greater king than that. It might sound nice to have a king who would give you great material wealth and freedom from all your troubles in this life. But that is nothing compared to a king who gives you eternal life and freedom from sin, from the fear of death, and from the power of the devil. You could ask for no greater king than the king who suffered and died for you. And that is the king you find as you look at Jesus.

On this Christ the King Sunday, take some time to appreciate what it means to have a king who was willing to give his life for you. But also remember

that Jesus is no longer in that state of humiliation. He had to undergo the cruel mockery we witness in our reading. He had to be led to the cross and suffer and die. But the humiliation of the cross led to the exaltation of the empty tomb and the place at his Father's right hand. That is where Jesus is right now. He is no longer a bruised and bloodied, pathetic figure. He is an all-powerful king, who is ruling the whole universe and awaiting the day of his return. When we see Jesus again, then we will see a king in his glory. Alexander the Great is no match for the Jesus the Conquering Hero riding in to judge all the nations of the earth.

Today is the final Sunday of the church year. That means we have once again had the opportunity to review the entire life and work of Jesus Christ. We witnessed his birth at Bethlehem, his baptism, his public ministry, his suffering and death, his resurrection and his ascension. We saw how the work of Jesus impacts our lives by giving us hope and a future. And we close the year with a final glimpse of Jesus as our king. And although the world might look at this picture of Jesus and laugh—although the world might see Jesus as a failure and his followers as fools, we know the truth. We know that Jesus is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. We await his glorious return and look forward to the day when we will rule with him into all eternity. **Amen.**

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