

St. James' Episcopal Church Cindy Baskin  
Proper 29-C: **CHRIST THE KING SUNDAY** November 21, 2010  
Texts: Jer 23:1-6; Ps 46; Col 1:11-20; Luke 23:33-43

**Theme:** Jesus is Lord and Jesus reigns!  
**Subject:** Will we serve this one who is King?

**Scripture Reference:** *And the people stood by, watching* (33:35a);

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### **Introduction: Christ the King Sunday**

Most of you are probably aware that we at St. James' have scheduled this Sunday as "Commitment Sunday" or Pledge Ingathering Sunday – the Sunday when we ask for all financial pledge cards to be returned and when we ask God's blessing upon those commitments as we "joyfully thank our generous God." If you've followed our bulletin announcements the past two weeks, you will also know that today we will inter the cremated remains of Bob Graf in our Memorial Garden following the 11:00 service. It was exactly one year ago in 2009 that we celebrated Bob's life and ministry among us. Bob was present for that celebration – it was the last time he was able to go out and he died at home the very next day.

So Commitment Sunday and a Committal Service – both today. But if you checked a liturgical calendar, you might also know that this Sunday is "Christ the King" Sunday – the last Sunday of our Church Year. This Sunday completes the Christian journey through the life of Jesus on earth and in heaven, which began with the preparation for Jesus' birth in Advent. Next Sunday we begin that same journey once again as the season of Advent begins.

It's appropriate that on this the last Sunday of the church year we celebrate Christ who is king. On this Sunday we express liturgically our faith that Christ is indeed king of kings and lord of lords. We sing hymns like *Crown Him with Many Crowns* and *Jesus Shall Reign* (with which we will go forth from this place), affirming that Christ has conquered all evil and will restore all things. We proclaim our belief that all humanity, presently divided and wounded by sin, will ultimately find completion, unity, and peace under God's reign. Yet the scripture texts assigned for the Feast of Christ the King are somewhat paradoxical.

### **Today's Scriptures**

To be sure, in our Old Testament lesson, Jeremiah prophesies that the LORD will "*raise up for David a Branch, and he shall reign as king,*" a king who will execute justice and righteousness in the land. The passage from Colossians in the New Testament sings of the Father who has "*rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son*" – Christ who is "*the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.*" But in the Gospel reading from Luke, we behold a man who hardly resembles any common conception of a king. Instead we see Jesus, hanging in pain on a cross, crucified between two criminals. Only a placard tacked to the cross above his head and bearing the inscription: "*King of the Jews*" denotes anything about Jesus being a king; and this placard is meant to be sarcastic!

Around this inscription, Luke paints a disturbing picture. The people **stand and watch**, seemingly impassive. The leaders actively **scoff**, ridiculing Jesus. The soldiers **mock**. One of the criminals **derides** Jesus. The leaders, soldiers, and criminal all taunt Jesus and challenge him to save himself if he is indeed the Messiah, a king. These taunts recall Jesus being out in the wilderness before his public ministry began when the devil tempts him to prove that he is truly God's Son by saving his own life – not by giving it away, but by holding onto it.

Because Jesus does not exercise his divine power and escape from the cross, the three

mocking taunts provide incredible irony: the one who will not save himself is indeed the one who saves others. This Jesus who hardly looks like a king is indeed the Christ who is King. Certainly none of those mocking Jesus believe that he is a king. Yet there is one – the other criminal hanging there on a cross – who does recognize Jesus’ kingship. Somehow this other criminal sees clearly the injustice, saying “*this man has done nothing wrong . . .*” (v. 41). This one man senses the reality of a “kingdom” that cannot be seen except by a clear inner eye. And so he pleads: “*Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.*”

What led this man to this recognition? To his belief that this Jesus was indeed a king? Perhaps it was the reality of his own imminent death. Perhaps it was insight he gained as he watched Jesus nailed to the cross beside him and heard Jesus say, “*Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.*” Perhaps he saw in this man Jesus a love so great and so deep that he knew he too could be accepted, despite all that he had done and all that had gone before. But somehow this man, this criminal, recognizes Jesus as Christ the King and cries out: *Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.*

### **What will enable us to experience the truth that Jesus is the King of Kings?**

A few years ago, a couple came to visit here at St. James’. As I was talking with them, the husband commented that they had been worshiping at a church where altar calls were a regular feature of every service. Then the husband commented: “You know, you can only get saved so many times.” While that’s a true statement, I sometimes wonder if some of us who worship in more liturgical traditions may get stuck, despite the inherent depth of our liturgy.

In 1931, NBC invited the great musician and conductor Arturo Toscanini to conduct a concert tour of Latin America. The orchestra for the tour was made up of select professional musicians from around the U.S. They had played Beethoven’s Sixth Symphony so many times they could almost play it for memory. Unfortunately, they had played it so much that they had become bored, apathetic professionals. But the day Toscanini picked up the baton and began to conduct, something happened. Everyone could sense it. By the end of the first movement, no musician was day-dreaming. Everyone was intent on the music and played it as if for the first time. At the end of the final movement, after Toscanini put down his baton, the members of the orchestra spontaneously rose to their feet and began to applaud. Toscanini stood there until they ceased. Then he said: “**That was not Toscanini. That was Beethoven. You’ve just never heard him before.**”

How many of us gathered here – some of us “professional Christians” – need to hear Jesus, either again or perhaps for the first time and cry out, “*Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom*”? Will we truly acknowledge Jesus as King of Kings and Lord of Lords?