

Luke 23:33-43

Saint Paul's Episcopal Church

23 November 2025

In nomine...

Several years ago, the parish I was serving undertook a remodeling process for one of its chapels. When the education wing of the church was built this chapel was built as the children's chapel, though its formal name was the Chapel of Christ the King. It had a lovely little pipe organ that perfectly filled the space with music and the timbre of it was incredible – it was wonderful for setting the scene with young voices or simple chants. It had little child sized pews, the height of the altar rail was also perfect for kids, and it had the most beautiful marble altar. On the wall behind the altar was a 4-foot tall – Christus Rex, Christ portrayed as a king, wearing princely robes and a crown. It was not particularly attractive, but it was OK. Until one day I was in the chapel speaking with the head of the altar guild and she said to me, “you know, I always thought... wait, you have to promise you will not tell anyone about this” “Ok” “Well, I always thought that this image of Jesus looked a lot like Johnny Depp in the Pirates of the Caribbean movies.

I was shocked. Because, my friends, it was a spitting image. Christ the King looked exactly like Captain Jack Sparrow. I could never unsee it. So, when we got around to remodeling the space, replacing Captain Jack Sparrow, was pretty high on my list of things that I hoped that we could do.

Of course, we did the reasonable thing which was to make sure that no one related to the person who gave the cross was still around before we made any changes. The crucifix that we eventually chose for the space was a big change. It was not a Christus Rex and Jesus did not look like Johnny Depp – in fact, we chose to install a crucifix that portrayed Jesus on the cross, eyes cast to floor, and his skin was a beautiful ebony color. Our journey that led to the decision to portray Jesus as a black man, rather than a white man, is a worthwhile conversation for another day.

A couple of months after we reopened the chapel, I was again speaking with the head of the altar guild, though it was a new head of the altar guild, but we were speaking and they said to me, “you know we should probably rename the chapel.” Why, I asked. “Because Jesus is no longer portrayed as a king.” And now I have answered your question about why is he telling us this story? Because at first glance it seems a little weird to speak about Jesus' kingship, his lordship, through the lens of his crucifixion.

If I had asked you to guess what gospel lesson we might hear on Christ the King Sunday, there is, and this was evidenced at Bible Study on Thursday, there is a pretty good chance that you are going to guess something other than his crucifixion, because of course you are. Any of us when thinking about kingship are going to go to a glorious moment, not a moment of defeat, of despair, of disaster.

The Transfiguration, the triumphal entry in Jerusalem, the presentation of Jesus in the Temple, even the visit of the Magi – all seem better options for today. And yet, the Church in her wisdom has chosen this reading from Luke. Why? Why when speak of Jesus' kingship, do we do it through the lens of his crucifixion? Why would

we speak about death when we are meant to be speaking about glory? Because to do anything else would be to set our eyes on earthly things, not on things heavenly.

Our world teaches that kings, that lords, that those with power and authority should be respected, revered, feared, and obeyed at all times—no matter how they treat us or the people they are meant to rule over. No matter despicable, a person's politics might be we are told to respect the office, to show deference, to follow no matter the direction. This has not though led us anywhere good. This sort of following is how we ended up with chattel slavery in this country and the Jim Crow policies that endured long after its demise. It is how we have ended up in our current situation where any black or brown person can be rounded up and held without cause. It is how voting rights are being rolled back and gerrymandered out of existence. None of this is Christlike and we should resist such kingship.

We speak about Jesus' kingship through the lens of the crucifixion because it is the only way that it makes sense. In the twelfth chapter of John's gospel, we encounter a group of Greeks, read: non-Jews, who desire to see Jesus.

When Andrew and Philip tell this to Jesus he says, "the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified." He continues, "And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself." It is through the cross that Jesus draws all people to himself. The cross is the thing that changes the whole human story. On the cross we see the glory of God. On the cross we see what lordship looks like. On the cross we see that being a king means loving your people so deeply that you are willing to die for them.

The cross is at the center of Jesus' kingship, and it must be at the center of our lives also. If we want to enter the glory of our Lord, we need to look at the cross. On the cross we hear Jesus promise to the man who is condemned to die, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise." Forgiveness and reconciliation are at the heart of Christ's kingship. Many of us will gather with family this week to mark the Thanksgiving holiday and many of us will be with relatives that we find difficult. Where it is possible, I urge you to work for forgiveness and reconciliation. We will not offer to anyone an encounter with the risen Christ, by refusing to speak with them. We will not build the Kingdom, by ignoring those we find difficult. We will not grant anyone a glimpse of Christ's kingship, by withholding our love.

Let us pray.

Jesus, you are our brother, our friend, our Lord, and our King; thank you for the example that you have given us, for offering yourself to us, and for loving us even when we are not worthy of your love – give us strength and courage to follow your example even when it costs more than we think we can bear, trusting that you will be with us even unto the end of the ages; we make our in your most holy name. Amen.