

God's Power Is Different—Reign of Christ

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[Jeremiah 23:1-6](#)

[Psalm 46](#)

[Colossians 1:11-20](#)

[Luke 23:33-43](#)

(I think I mentioned this last Sunday but,) these Sundays, both this one, and last week, and the ones to come—are about endings. They are about how our cyclical way of counting time as the Church has come to both its finish, and its beginning. And just like New Year's Eve in a month or so, now is a time, as the Church, to take stock.

That's pretty much what today's lessons are about, taking stock. And this is what this feast day called Reign of Christ, or Christ the King, is about too. Christ is our Saviour, our Shepherd, our God, our Prince of Peace, our King. But what does that really mean?

Well, first, we can always thank England with their royals and all their constant, low-level drama, to keep the idea of monarchy close to mind. Queen Elizabeth has died. And now King Charles III is on the throne. The point is, there can only be one monarch at a time. And when our tradition uses that metaphor, King, for Christ, We mean Christ is on top. England is not on top. The United States isn't on top. The political left isn't *it*, the political right isn't *it*. Your spouse isn't on top, nor your kids, *nor* even you. And this reality of our faith, I don't think, ever stops being upsetting. Firstly, today we confess: Christ is on top.

Secondly, there's another thing about monarchy to remember. The king or the queen embodies the will of both God and the people. King David from the bible is a great example. The people loved him, and he—for the most part—did what God asked. 100s of years after King David, the political context for the prophecy we heard from the prophet Jeremiah today was, basically, chaos.

Jeremiah was working in Jerusalem, and Jerusalem then was like Ukraine now: under siege and very much worried about the future. The king when Jeremiah was prophesying was doing only what the people wanted—or some of the people— and not at all what God had asked. And when Jeremiah reports what God is up to, how God is going to bring a real leader to the scene—that leader is said to be descended from David.

David, of course, was the ideal king. And the King, the Messiah, that everyone is expecting in Jesus' day was going to be like David. They all hope the Messiah, the King, will execute justice,

and pick up the little guy, break the bow and shatter the spear, like the Psalmist said, he will make war to cease.

And as you heard the soldiers and leaders in Luke mocking Jesus, they expected a little more *oomph* from their Messiah. They figured the Messiah, the King, would be fighting fire with fire, when it came to the whole making-wars-to-cess department.

But I said this Sunday is a Sunday for taking stock. So, the third thing to keep in mind, and one of the main, I guess you could say, gut-punches, of our faith, is depicted on the cover of your bulletin.

There you see a stylized version of a very old image, an image that is called *Christus Rex*, which is just Latin for Christ the King. In this image there is Jesus with a crown. And there is Jesus nailed to a cross too. And there is Jesus with open eyes, and in his right mind. The crucified, risen King, who reigns still from the cross.

It's always hard for us who are so used to understanding the cross as an image of victory and salvation and glory for so many hundreds of years—it's hard for us to comprehend just how disgusting crucifixion was to the people of Jesus' time. It would be like having a Jesus sitting in an electric chair with a crown on. Jesus dying in a choke-hold, or Jesus being water-boarded. It was a hideous and ruthless practice that the Roman Empire reserved for only their most pernicious, political enemies.

That guy—the humiliated one, the powerless one, that's our king.

I think points 1 and 2 are ok, even though a little uncomfortable. Point 1, Christ is on top of all things, most important. Ok. Point 2, Christ embodies the will of God, but the people were disappointed with David in mind, sure.

Point 3, Christ is our *crucified* King. That is where we often hit a wall. You will probably say, "Well, the cross was just like a transaction. It's not the image of God, it was just something God did, in order to get to the good part." And that's somewhat true, there are many, many images of God. As the author of Colossians says, Christ is the image of God, but that takes many shapes—healing and teaching, walking and eating.

But to not affirm the *Christus Rex* we have here on our bulletins would, I'm afraid, be avoiding the reality of what we believe were and are God's choices. We believe that God chose this. The cross was not an accident. God was not forced into a corner by our badness, our sin. This was how, we confess, God freely chose to reveal God.

Because in Christ all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and 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. The cross, and all its powerlessness, all its sadness and shame, simply is it.

That is the door to a very different kind of glory, and power, and victory. Our faith says there is no other way.

And Luke's Gospel affirms this of course. It's full of what seems like bitter irony. The people are talking about the "Messiah" of course, that's Hebrew for Christ. It's that cultural word that means King, but with David in mind. If you're the David 2.0, they say, well: "He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!" But he would never do that. That would be the opposite of God's way.

The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine, and saying, "If you are the King of the Judeans, save yourself!" There was also an inscription over him, 'This is the King of the Judeans.'" This also is irony meant to reveal to us what is true. It's not mockery, it's just the truth.

Notice it's the soldiers and the leaders doing the jeering. These are the ones who have been using power to make their way in the world. They don't understand any other way. The truth to them is a joke. "Forgive them," Jesus says, "For they do not know what they are doing."

And I think if we're honest with ourselves, we don't really understand any other way either. Jesus is being mocked and killed. They have taken every shred of dignity from him. He is in agony. He is powerless, isn't he? I don't want that—do you want that?

But I feel like something is nagging at these leaders and soldiers and us too, in Luke's Gospel. They know something is going on. Those being killed beside him also know something is up. The one wants old-fashioned power. But the other gets it. Jesus didn't do anything wrong, he says, he must have chosen this path. And Jesus did. God did.

God *could* have zapped the soldiers. God *could* have zapped the minds of the leaders and given them all the right knowledge and faith too I suppose. But this is the portrait, the pathway, that God chose. This was how it was going to end from the beginning.

Now, of course, we believe too in a resurrection, you'll remind me. But the resurrection means nothing without the cross. The Resurrected Christ, the Christus Rex, still has the wounds! The resurrection of Christ is the exclamation point at the end of the sentence. And the sentence says: God's power is different!

God's identity is about patience and surrender and selflessness, it is about stillness, and it is about mercy—it is about love. All these things we see perfectly in the cross, they are embodied in Christ, our King, they are the "He" in Colossians:

[Patience] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for [by Surrender] all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through [Mercy] and for [Mercy]. [Selflessness] is before all things, and in [Selflessness] all things hold together [Love] is the head of the body, the church; [Love] is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that [Love] might come to have first place in everything.

When we say Christ is our king, we say: Patience, surrender, selflessness, stillness, mercy and love—are the most powerful things ever known. And they are on top.

Amen.