

# Christ the Lord Episcopal Church Pinole, CA

Christ the King Sunday: November 20, 2022

“Jesus Remember Me”

Rev. Dr. Lois Williams

Good morning and welcome to Christ the Lord on this Sunday when we celebrate Christ the King, our namesake. Today’s readings are rich for discussion, and I would like to begin with faith and forgiveness.

Our Gospel has Jesus giving absolution in what I like to think of as "the forever and ever" mode. When I hear terms that describe Christ as the salvation of the world, I think of this particular scripture. Here we are at the place of the skull; the place where Jesus and two other criminals are being crucified. This is where Luke wants to make sure we understand who Jesus is, and that this is a moment in God’s time.

This leads us to the taunts and challenges to Jesus to save himself that actually become a demonstration of his true identity. In their calls for Jesus to demonstrate his power to save - the leaders, the soldiers, and the first criminal address him with titles that, from their perspective, are supposed to add to the ridicule. But these actually offer up instead the valid affirmations of Jesus’ true identity for Luke and his readers: “Messiah of God,” “chosen one,” “King of the Jews”. Those who are least likely are, ironically, pronouncing Christian truths about Jesus without realizing it. They are unable to see Jesus’ identity as “Messiah,” “chosen one,” and “King” which is inextricably linked to his crucifixion. The salvation Jesus offers takes place through the cross, not apart from it.

I often meet people who deal with chronic and terminal illness in my day-to-day work, and more often than not I hear of stories where the church, whether it's people or it's policy, became a stumbling block to their faith. For many, even their bad church experiences did not keep them from having a spiritual life, but it did make a religious life a precarious thought. It is this scripture I often refer to.

Here we have Jesus, not only forgiving those who have betrayed him, are active in crucifying him, and are taunting him, but he forgives and states that the criminal next to him, just by uttering the words, "remember me", will be in paradise. Remember that scripture and sermon from a few weeks ago? This criminal will be in that place that is too wonderful to imagine just because he recognized that Jesus was from God. And I would like to believe, it wasn't Jesus' stature on that cross, but rather the love and mercy being expressed even as Jesus suffered, that caused the criminal's heart to change.

What this tells me is (and this may be sacrilegious) that baptism, communion, confession, lighted candles on the altar, processions, and all the wonderful, yet often stressful things we participate in, are not for God's purpose, but for ours. The rituals we participate in we do as a reminder of God's presence and greatness in our lives. We do them, as Jesus asks us, in remembrance of him. Jesus is telling us here today, that just recognizing that we ourselves rightly deserve what we get because of missing the mark, because of broken relationships, because of all the things we do that are less-than, once confessed, can bring us to a place of mercy, grace and peace. That is all that is needed to find that paradise, to enter God's kingdom.

We alone, cannot find that mercy or grace within ourselves; but we can through the mercy of God. And should receiving that mercy, make us feel beloved of God and change our ways more and more to live in love as Christ loved us, then we

ourselves are helping to bring God's kingdom to earth, in other words a little bit of paradise - a place where all are forgiven and welcome.

What this scripture also brings into play is our theological stances. I believe God will be much more merciful and forgiving for any wrong theories of theology, and might be a bit more concerned about those theologies that caused harm to one another. Those that scattered the sheep.

This second criminal asks something of Jesus, but his earnest request contrasts with the first criminal, whose attitude is selfish, with implied privilege, an impertinent demand. While others in the scene use titles to mock Jesus, showing they do not really believe Jesus to be Messiah and King,

But this second criminal accepts in utter sincerity the inscription's identification of Jesus as "King", asking that he be remembered when Jesus comes into his kingdom. He is almost speaking to Jesus in a startlingly personal and intimate fashion, addressing Jesus directly by name and not with a sarcastic use of a title. Again, mercy is free for the asking, when asked from the heart.

Luke's crucifixion scene shows the wide scope of Jesus' offer of absolution. Whatever evil or crime one has done there is no barrier for acceptance into Jesus' kingdom. Jesus offers direct access to salvation to persons worthy of the most extreme punishment for their sins. Even those carrying out the crucifixion and the mockeries can be forgiven. And though he responds to the second criminal's request, Jesus ignores the calls to save himself, because it is through the cross that he comes into his kingdom; where those deemed unrighteous may share in the salvation of the righteous. Jesus as King, or Christ as Lord, is a reign in not a death-dealing system intent on punishment, but a "paradise" that "today" extends even to those whom we do not think deserve it.

This is our last Sunday after Pentecost. We will then begin to wait with expectation for the birth of Jesus. We begin our holiday season with Thanksgiving this week. I urge you to spend some time thinking about how you would live if you really believed you were truly forgiven, if you really felt the weight off your shoulders of anything you have been carrying.

Imagine that feeling. Would you feel lighter, happier, would you act kinder, be more loving and accepting, would you be less angry and more understanding? Who do you need to forgive, what do you need to feel forgiven? These are the things that we need to clear to prepare for a wonderful holiday season, to be ready for the Christ child. To be able to come with newness and innocence into the next year. We are broken, yes, but we are forgiven, and we are blessed, because Christ is our King, a king of servitude, love and mercy. Amen