

Sunday, November 20, 2022 – Reign of Christ Sunday

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Introduction

Jeremiah's promise of the execution of "justice and righteousness in the land" finds ironic fulfillment in the execution of Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews. It appears utterly contradictory that a king should be crucified with a criminal. This victory appears for all the world as humiliating defeat. Yet through the gate of death Jesus opens the door to paradise.

Prayer of the Day

O God, our true life, to serve you is freedom, and to know you is unending joy. We worship you, we glorify you, we give thanks to you for your great glory. Abide with us, reign in us, and make this world into a fit habitation for your divine majesty, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

First Reading: Jeremiah 23:1-6

Today's reading builds on the common, ancient Near Eastern metaphor of the king as shepherd. Judah's unjust rulers have caused their people, their "flock," to be scattered. Nevertheless, God will raise up a new and righteous shepherd who will rule a restored Judah.

¹Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! says the LORD.

²Therefore thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, concerning the shepherds who shepherd my people: It is you who have scattered my flock, and have driven them away, and you have not attended to them. So I will attend to you for your evil doings, says the LORD. ³Then I myself will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the lands where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply. ⁴I will raise up shepherds over them who will shepherd them, and they shall not fear any longer, or be dismayed, nor shall any be missing, says the LORD.

⁵The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. ⁶In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. And this is the name by which he will be called: "The LORD is our righteousness."

Psalm-reading: Luke 1:68-79

⁶⁸Blessed are you, Lord, the | God of Israel,
you have come to your people and | set them free.

⁶⁹**You have raised up for us a | mighty Savior,
born of the house of your | servant David.**

⁷⁰Through your holy prophets, you promised of old to save us | from our enemies,
⁷¹from the hands of | all who hate us,

⁷²**to show mercy | to our forebears,
and to remember your | holy covenant.**

⁷³This was the oath you swore to our | father Abraham:

⁷⁴to set us free from the hands of our | enemies,
**free to worship you | without fear,
⁷⁵holy and righteous before you, all the days | of our life.**

⁷⁶And you, child, shall be called the prophet of | the Most High,
for you will go before the Lord to pre- | pare the way,

⁷⁷**to give God's people knowledge | of salvation
by the forgiveness | of their sins.**

⁷⁸In the tender compassion | of our God
the dawn from on high shall | break upon us,

⁷⁹**to shine on those who dwell in darkness and in the shad- | ow of death,
and to guide our feet into the | way of peace.**

Second Reading: Colossians 1:11-20

An early Christian hymn praises the mystery of the political, personal, and mystical Christ, the one who was present at creation and is eternally reigning with God.

¹¹May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully ¹²giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light. ¹³He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, ¹⁴in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

¹⁵He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; ¹⁶for in him 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 him and for him. ¹⁷He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. ¹⁹For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, ²⁰and 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.

Gospel: Luke 23:33-43

Amid scoffing and slander from those who sarcastically call him Messiah and king, Jesus reveals that to be Messiah and king is to give one's life for others. Here he uses his power to welcome a despised sinner to paradise but puts his own death into God's hands.

³³When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. ³⁴¶Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." ¶ And they cast lots to divide his clothing. ³⁵And the people stood by, watching; but the leaders scoffed at him, saying, "He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!" ³⁶The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine, ³⁷and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!" ³⁸There was also an inscription over him, "This is the King of the Jews."

³⁹One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, "Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!" ⁴⁰But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? ⁴¹And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong." ⁴²Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." ⁴³He replied, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

Prayers of Intercession

United with your saints across time and place, we pray for our shared world, saying “God, in your mercy,” and responding, “receive our prayer.”

A brief silence.

We pray for your church. Embolden denominations and faith-based organizations in creative and collaborative ministries and increase our work for the sake of the gospel. God, in your mercy, **receive our prayer.**

We pray for the earth. Protect waterways from pollution and animal habitats from destruction (*local water sources or protected lands may be named*). Guide us in careful stewardship of waters, plant life, and animals. God, in your mercy, **receive our prayer.**

We pray for the nations of the world. Instill in every leader’s heart a desire for justice and peace. Support the work of international collaborations that seek the goals of health and joy for all people (*especially*). God, in your mercy, **receive our prayer.**

We pray for all who are undermined or oppressed. Amplify the voices of the unheard and break open stubborn systems of injustice. Bring about your righteousness and fill us all with your redeeming light. God, in your mercy, **receive our prayer.**

We pray for this assembly. Guide our pastor/s, deacon/s, and council members in discernment, and nurture new leaders with fresh ideas. Give this congregation a spirit of discipleship and service. God, in your mercy, **receive our prayer.**

We give thanks for all who have died in the faith (*especially*). Console us who mourn and comfort us with the beautiful promise of life in your kingdom. God, in your mercy, **receive our prayer.**

Accept these prayers, gracious God, and those known only to you; through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Amen.

A reflection for this Reign of Christ Sunday...

Who Is Jesus?

Jesus' true identity seems to remain a mystery for most of the disciples. Jesus can teach, preach, heal, cast out demons, challenge authority and more, but still they do not comprehend. You might say it is a case of mistaken identity as the disciples and other followers seem to be hoping to discover something very different from the real Jesus. It is the criminal executed with Jesus who in his dying desperation says, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Clearly, the criminal has no other hope, still in this moment he acknowledges Jesus' true identity.

Modern followers of Jesus resemble those ancient followers in many ways. Everyone has their own image of Jesus, the gifts we want Jesus to bring us, the ways we want Jesus to fix those things in our lives that cause pain or suffering. In our anxiety we want Jesus to be our magical savior. It can be frustrating when we discover a very different Jesus. Instead of one who fixes everything in an instant, Jesus is the one who walks with us through the darkest valleys. Jesus is the one who calls us to lives of service—and again and again as we care for the needs of others we discover the face of Jesus himself in the lost, the last, and the least.

Our sin gets in the way, yet those who profess Jesus as Christ the King—the one in whom the fullness of God was pleased to dwell—are forever seeking to be clear in heart, mind, and soul about the true nature of his identity, and how we can share that identity with others.

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