

Last Sunday of the Church Year 11/24/19
St. Luke 23:27-43 29C

“IF YOU ARE THE KING OF THE JEWS, SAVE YOURSELF!”

He doesn't look like a king, dying as a common criminal. Think of it this way: If I gave you a box of crayons and a piece of paper, and said, “Draw a picture of a king.” Your king would, most likely, wear a crown of gold, adorned with brilliant gemstones. He may have a flowing cape of dazzling colors and a diamond-encrusted scepter. He may be seating on a huge throne.

But, dying on a cross, no. Your king Jesus most certainly didn't look like a king dying on that cross; anymore that He looked like a king as he being beaten, whipped, and crowned with a crown of thorns; as He is insulted and mocked by the crowd and the Roman soldiers, “If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself (v. 37)!”

He didn't look or act like a king, so they didn't believe. They doubted. Dear Saints of God, on this side of heaven, evil triumphs and the children of God suffer. And so we find ourselves in this world of perversity and sin, doubting.

Jesus didn't look like a king to those Roman soldiers. And honestly, as we walk by faith, to our eyes, eyes that sometimes fill with tears, He doesn't always look like our king who rules over all, and governs His church for our good.

That is because we see a contradiction between suffering and God's rule. It is easy to believe that God is in charge of things when all is going well. But, it is not easy to understand how Christ is our King who rules over all the world when evil is so rampant and prevalent in the world and in our lives. If Christ is our king, why are there wars and famines and diseases,

heartache and sorrow? If Christ really is our king, why do the evil prosper? Why do the perpetrators of injustice succeed? Some people give up on God when the cross of suffering, illness, or sorrow comes. For them, the cross is evidence that God is not in charge. If we are honest, there are times when we all wonder: why there is so much evil and pain if Christ is our king who governs everything for our good?

In our doubt, we cry to Jesus, “If...” “If you are the King, deliver me from cancer, from Alzheimer’s, from all disease and illness, danger and hunger.” “If you are the King, save me from the lies of the devil, financial ruin, calamity by fire and water, from the slander of lying lips. If you are the King, why am I so afraid, filled with worry and dread?

“In the world you will have tribulation,” Jesus promised us (Jn 16:33). And, we don’t want it! The crosses that we bear are reminders to us that this creation and our lives are cursed by sin. And, we don’t like it.

Ever since the fall into sin, we have been held hostage by sin, death, and the devil. The only way for us to be free from these unholy three is for God Himself to free us. So, God, in His love, sent His own Son to free us, to redeem us.

II. The Apostle Paul says it in our Epistle reading, “He – that is, God the Father – delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son (Co 1:13).” The GOOD NEWS of the Gospel is that Jesus came to deliver you and transfer you to His Kingdom of Grace. And He did it by being born of a Virgin to be human just like you. And He took upon Himself all the darkness of the valley of the shadow of death -- every illness and tragedy, every sorrow and heartache, every remorse and regret, every word of deceit and anger, every act of malice and evil – and He carried it to the cross to die a violent and bloody death.

By His death, He triumphed over sin and all the curse of sin. And, He forever crushed the head of the father of all lies.

“Since the children have flesh and blood, He [Jesus] too shared in their humanity so that by His death He might destroy him who holds the power of death -- that is, the devil -- and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death,” the Bible says (He 2:14).

Jesus' lifeless body was taken from the cross and laid to rest in the tomb. Three days later, God raised His Son to life again. Christ's resurrection means that He has won the victory over sin, death, and hell.

In the new birth of Water and the Word of Baptism, Christ has delivered you from the domain of darkness and transferred you into His kingdom, where He reigns over you with the forgiveness of sins and His grace. Here, in His kingdom, He reigns over you as your king.

III. In these last Sundays of the church year, as we focus on the second and final coming of Christ, we are to be watchful and faithful, eagerly awaiting our Lord's return. This Sunday comforts us, that as we wait, Christ is our King who has triumphed over sin, death, and the devil. Before His ascension, He taught us, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me (Mt 28:18).” He now rules with His almighty power over all creation, especially governing and protecting His Church. And, He will lead His church to the glory of heaven.

But, as we wait, eagerly but patiently, for our Lord to come again and rescue us from every evil and lead us to heaven, we remember His words, “A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master (Mt 10:24).”

Baptized and living in Christ, everything of our Master's is ours -- His death, His resurrection from the grave, His victory over sin and death, His

eternal life. And, and, His enmity with the world. As Jesus carried the cross during His earthly life, we can expect no less.

Yes, there is laid up in heaven for us the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to us on the day of our exodus from this vale of tears. But as we live yet on this side of heaven, we must ever hear the words of our King, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me (Mt 16:24)."

It is important to remember that, because on this side of heaven, we continue to experience the suffering and sorrow of the cross. We continue to live in a world cursed by sin. Being a Christian does not mean freedom from suffering. As the evil one stalked our Lord until His death, so we can expect to undergo suffering for Christ's sake.

But, even in this, we rejoice and give thanks. Because of Christ's cross, God rules through and over the cross. Just as God established His rule among us through Jesus' suffering, so He brings us the blessings of His rule through our suffering.

On the cross, in mortal anguish, the very Son of God cried, "My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me?" Martin Luther called these words the strongest confession of faith in all the Scriptures. Jesus knew, even in His dying anguish, that His Father was in charge and He was accomplishing His will.

Under the cross, we cry out in faith to God, just as Christ Himself did, because in faith we know God is in control! He has commanded us to come boldly to His throne to find grace to help in our time of need. When we have decisions to make, burdens to bear, problems to face, we cry out in confident faith that God will hear and will deliver us in the way and time He knows best.

“We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him,” the Bible comforts us (Ro 8:28). God brings good even out of the crosses that we bear. God’s guiding hand never fails us!

Through the hearing and learning of His Word and the eating and drinking of His Son’s body and blood, God gives us grace and strengthens the faith He gave us in our baptism, so that we may bear up under the cross. And, He promises us the Sabbath-rest of heaven to come. Today, we bear the cross. But, the day of our deliverance is coming, when God will wipe all the tears from our eyes and we will rest from our struggles because our King Jesus did die on that cross to save us.