

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt
Christ the King Sunday - Year C
St. Paul's Lutheran Church
Jeremiah 23:1-6
Psalm 46
Colossians 1:11-20
Luke 23:33-43
11/20/2022

Gospel

The Holy Gospel according to St. Luke:

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."

The Gospel of Our Lord

Prayer

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.

The King

Good morning. Every week when I get the prayers of intercession ready I follow a pattern. I copy the same prayer that I copy every week into them, and then I go to gunviolencearchive.org to check and see if we have had a mass shooting yet. I started doing this after the Uvalde shooting, and my thought was that I would keep the prayer in until we went a week without a mass shooting. The shooting was on May 24, and we have yet to go a single week without one. This week, I was in Wheeling, WV when I heard about the shooting at UVA. When I think back to the “major” shootings of my childhood (which is a horrible thing to even begin to categorize), the Columbine shooting sticks out, as well as the one in Virginia Tech. Back then, those places seemed so far away. Today? Well, they seem a lot closer than they used to be. Charlottesville joins the unfortunate group of universities that have experienced the horror of mass shootings. Then, as I scrolled through the news this morning on my iPad I read about ANOTHER shooting, this time in Colorado Springs, Colorado. It seems that late last night someone started opening fire at an LGBT night club, killing 5 and injuring at least 18 others.

I share the same story I have mentioned before, years ago when I was first called here I was discussing with some fellow pastors at what point does a shooting just become “normal.” To which Pastor Andrew Tucker replied that the moment we stop preaching about these disasters, we allow

people to accept that this is a normal behavior, something that it clearly is not. We must actively work against becoming numb to these events.

Which brings us to our Gospel text, a strange story given that we celebrate Christ the King today. Christ the King Sunday is the end of the lectionary church year. Beginning next week with Advent we start the year again, moving from Year C, with a focus on the Gospel of Luke, to Year A, which focuses on the Gospel of Matthew. You could consider it the church's new year's eve, which is usually a time of celebration. So, why pick the crucifixion story? Well, as one scholar writes, *“This lectionary text makes clear to us something quite different. The majesty of this king is revealed, not when we look up, but when we look down... The Lord above all lords is exactly the same one who was humbled on the cross; no other is the Lord.”*¹ Basically, when we read the crucifixion story, we get the clearest possible picture of who our God is... a human being who suffers because of the cruelty of others, and who dies because of that. The “New Year’s Eve” of the church puts the very core of the Christian message on display. As we discussed in our Monday Zoom Bible Study a few weeks ago, it helps us reflect backwards on the message we have heard this past year, and at the same time it puts what is coming, the season of Advent, into context.

But if you’re like me, you might be asking a different question. What does this Feast day, this celebration, and this Gospel text have to tell us in light of the continued senseless violence we see? Well, first it reminds us that our God is one who understands our pain. Not only has God experienced the same grief we share, but God too has been a victim.

¹ Bartlett, David L., and Barbara B. Taylor. *Feasting on the Word. Year C, Volume IV*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008. pp. 332-334.

Regardless of the group that experiences suffering, Jesus Christ speaks to them and says “I know, I understand.” It’s not fair, and God gets that.

But it does something else too. Because while the Gospel text centers on the cross, we know the story doesn’t end there! Jesus dies, yes, but three days later he rises from the dead! As we enter the long and dark winter we are reminded that when dawn comes and the sun rises, we see new light. We see this hope reflected in our Second Reading from Colossians. It’s a hope we cling to as we once again wrestle with the reality of the mass shooting problem here in the United States. So, let these words inspire you to bring about the change that God desires.

“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.”² Amen.

² Colossians 1:11-20 NRSV

