

Gospel and Sermon Transcript -Christ The King Sunday - November 23, 2025

It was 100 years ago this year that Pope Pius the 15th decided that we needed a day like this one, Christ the King Sunday.

You might know a little from history about people who were wanting to be king, the sorts of people who would do anything to gain and to keep power and to crush anyone who got in the way.

Boy, it's too bad that there aren't other examples from history or the Bible or even current events that would illustrate that ghastly tendency, right?

I'm not being serious for the moment.

I was kind of teasing a little bit there.

For a second, I thought you actually believed me.

That's all we know, really.

And so the reign of Christ Sunday takes all of that notion and puts it on its head.

And today, I'm going to spend some particularly focused time during the sermon with that Good Friday text that we're reading as the gospel in one particular moment.

Because I think it asks us as followers of Jesus and as church, who are we going to be?

How are we going to be as followers of one who extends mercy?

So that's our agenda.

Do that.

The Holy Gospel, according to St. Luke, the 23rd chapter.

When they came to the place that is called the skull,
they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right,
one on his left.

And then Jesus said, Father, forgive them.

They do not know what they're doing.

The soldiers cast lots to divide his clothing.

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.

The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him
sour wine and saying, if you are the king of the Jews,
save yourself.

There was also an inscription over him.

This is the king of the Jews.

One of the criminals who were hanged there
kept deriding him, saying, are you not the Messiah?

Save yourself and us.

But the other rebuked him.

He said, do you not fear God since you
are under the same sentence of condemnation?

And we indeed have been condemned justly,
for we're getting what we deserve for our deeds.

But this man has done nothing wrong.

And then he said, Jesus, remember me
when you come into your kingdom.

And Jesus replied, truly, I tell you,
today you will be with me in paradise.

The gospel of our Lord.

The Sermon

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

So what was on your playlist 40 years ago?

I can tell you one popular song was

"Everyone Wants to Rule the World."

My apologies to the group, tears for fears.

But I think maybe most of us just
want to rule our old little patch of it.

And that tendency starts early, nursery school,
and maybe even earlier than that,
as I hear stories about my two brothers who
were barely a year apart, always contesting
and contending with each other from the get-go.

My facetious words about not being
able to find stories, about our tendency to grasp power
and to hold onto it and to do any ruthless thing
to consolidate that power leads me to a couple of observations.

One is probably not even all that original.

The first is that this power is often
for the powerholder's own sake and not much else.

I admit to often feeling very dispirited about what I hear
and see in the world and think, do these people who supposedly
run things have my back at all?

I'm not so sure.

Now, you may have more confidence,
and I don't think I want to debate you about that.

I'm glad you do.

I wish I did.

The second observation is that power corrupts--
that's the one that's not mine-- absolute power

corrupts absolutely.

Lord Acton, if you're wanting someone to quote,

"Jesus takes all of that and puts it on its head."

I mean, there are certain things we expect from powerful people.

It's the things that people mocked Jesus about at Golgotha.

Well, you know what powerful people do, don't you?

They save themselves, and occasionally, if it's convenient,
they might save somebody else, too.

They will, with whatever force necessary,
reverse their circumstances.

So, Jesus, do what the world expects of you in your moment.

Here's where it pays to slow down and to focus a little bit
on what Jesus does.

He doesn't save himself.

And when somebody else who's suffering for whatever reason
asks for mercy, Jesus speaks comfort, and Jesus grants mercy.

The word "today" is a favorite of Luke's.

Let me give you two more examples of today.

Today, to you, is born a savior.

Today, my friend Zacchaeus, your home has found healing.

And to this unnamed person that we read about today, today,
you will be with me in paradise.

What I say next is probably more true about Mark's gospel than Luke's, but I can't help myself.

That I believe that Jesus is most fully his powerful self when his suffering is so public and so complete, and that he is being ground up by an empire that does grasp power and crushes anyone who would resist and makes an object lesson out of would-be resistors.

That Jesus is fully himself.

The one who is self-giving, the one who extends mercy, the one who embraces suffering.

My experience as a hospital chaplain taught me that as people approach the end of life, a lot of our trappings and artifice begins to fall away.

And we become more our true, honest, our true, original self.

However, as I'm reminded both by experience and the writing of the preacher Barbara Brown-Taylor, we might become mellow, or we might become cantankerous, or at least some charming blend of the two.

But the reality is the same.

We do become fully ourselves.

Thinking of Jesus here, his public humiliation,

his suffering, his life literally coming to an end,
I'm sure he could feel it in his bones and muscles
that he was dying.

And in his dying breaths, he doesn't rebuke, he doesn't judge,
he doesn't condemn, he forgives, he extends mercy.

So church, what does it mean to follow someone like this?

I'm going to sketch out a template,
and you can see if it fits and decide if it fits,
and you might be offended by some of it.

Jesus passed at Golgotha.

It's really over as far as his earthly life is concerned.

The preaching and the miracles, the feasts, all of it,
they're behind him.

His earthly future doesn't exist at all.

All Jesus has at Golgotha is the God-given gift of today.

To do and to be what God has made him to be.

And as we continue to live in that moment,
Jesus shows that integrity of a self-giving God
that is about restoring the world.

That's what all those other scriptures we heard read,
and the Psalm we rehearsed today reflect.

That's Jesus in the now, in the today.

Church, and maybe we'll speak specifically

about St. Matthew's for a minute.

Celebrating 150 years in the year 2026,

many of those days are behind us, and we look back,

and we're happy for things that have happened in ways

God has been faithful.

But those days aren't here anymore.

That's the offensive part, perhaps.

Or maybe it's more offensive for me

to tell you that we don't have a hot clue about our future.

We don't.

We, like Jesus, only have today.

And so the question before us is, who will we be today?

How will we be today?

There are some parallels, also in the amount of suffering

that goes on around us as we have to answer that question.

Back to my initial snarkiness about wishing there

were examples of suffering that is inflicted upon people

by others who want absolute power.

Unless you're OK with trillionaires and people feeding

out of dumpsters in the same society,

I would argue that there's something wrong with this picture.

So in that milieu, in that system, how do we follow Jesus?

Who will we be and how will we be in our moment, this now,
this today, this place?

God may give us a few more tomorrows,
but really, all we have and know is today.

And all we have and know, and this is all we need,
is a God who is so self-giving that he's incarnated
in the person of Jesus.

And at the very end, when there seems to be little to nothing
left, Jesus finds something.

Forgiveness, mercy, and a promise of a relationship,
a relationship that never ends.

Amen.