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St. Anne's Episcopal Church, Warsaw  
Last Sunday after Pentecost (Christ the King)  
November 20, 2022

Lectionary Year C: Luke 23:33-43

Maybe God should've given the people what they wanted. What became known as the Holy Land was, two thousand years ago, occupied by the Roman Empire, and it was considered an oppressive imperial regime by the Jewish faithful who lived there. Thus, Israel's Messiah was, in their minds, supposed to overthrow and conquer the Romans, purging the Romans and any Gentile co-conspirators from their land. One could think of such a Messiah as a political Messiah, which, in many ways, sounds a lot like a king or some other such ruler.

Not entirely coincidentally, the last Sunday after Pentecost is celebrated as Christ the King Sunday, where we recall how unconventional and nonconforming to expectations Jesus was. You see, God didn't give the people what they wanted. Jesus' kingship, in light of their desires, was an ironic or, perhaps, paradoxical one. Had God given them what they wanted, there would've been no parents of modest means like Mary and Joseph, no humble birthplace like the Bethlehem stable, and no association with the lowest social classes of the day. Furthermore, the example of self-denial and servanthood which Jesus left with all of his followers would've been completely reversed. Kings don't do the work of servants. Kings don't enter cities on the backs of donkeys. Kings don't accept defeat.

Perhaps you can think of a manager, supervisor, or some other sort of leader who didn't quite conform to your expectations...whose wardrobe was a little out of style, whose shoes weren't polished to a deep luster, and whose presence

wasn't exactly commanding. Were such things really problems at all? Or were they your problems, insofar as the out-of-style wardrobe, unpolished shoes, and non-commanding presence bothered you? In fact, this person could've been a perfectly competent leader, but your expectations became a source of prejudice. In short, that's what happened between Jesus and many of the Jewish faithful. They couldn't accept a Messiah who didn't conform to their expectations, and they wouldn't follow someone who didn't lead them the way they wanted to be led.

But had God given the people what they wanted -- a mighty, conquering, political Messiah -- would there have been atonement for sin and redemption of sinners without a cross? Would there have been the crown of glory of eternal life without a crown of thorns? The outcome of Christ's life and death was unexpected. Depending on one's perspective, the people got either more than they expected or something very different from what they expected.

Let's take this from the perspective of one of the criminals executed next to Jesus. He says to him, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom" (Luke 23:42). This isn't an extraordinary demand, really; the criminal merely wants Jesus to remember him and, perhaps, pray for his soul. If there's an afterlife, he figures Jesus is going upstairs while he is going downstairs. But this criminal gets a little more than he was expecting when Jesus responds, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43).

With God, one always ends up with more than one expected!

As you know, the approach of the year's end has us planning for next year, and members of the Vestry and the Finance Committee have been looking at our budget

for 2023...all of this following a stewardship campaign called "More than Enough." Today, I'd ask you to consider once again the "more than enough" things that God has done throughout history and in your lives right up to today. When the criminal thought it would be enough for Jesus to remember him in his kingdom, Jesus gives him more than enough and promised, "Today you will be with me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43b). When the five thousand needed to be fed and there were only five loaves and two fishes, there was more than enough for all to eat. When we recognize abundance instead of lament scarcity, we discover there is more than enough to sustain our ministries as a congregation.

So isn't it good, then, for people to get something other than what they want? Though betrayed, mocked, spat upon, and given the title "King of the Jews" (Luke 23:38b) in derision, Jesus -- through his suffering and death -- brought healing and life to all who believed in him. By not conforming to the expectations of his day, Jesus gave the world a perpetual inheritance of salvation, and, really, what does the world need more? A nice country for God's people to live in two thousand years ago or redemption from sin and death forever? An earthly king might accomplish the former, but Christ the King will accomplish the latter.

And then this nonconforming King, Jesus Christ, leaves us with his example -- one of humility, servitude, and self-offering. Another king would've given us glamor and glory, but not Christ the King. Glamor and glory do not, at their core, make the world a better place, but helping others and giving of ourselves do. It is, therefore, no surprise to find the many ways Christians have discerned and developed ministries of charity and assistance for the poor. Today's assembly and distribution of Thanksgiving baskets is one of several exam-

ples right here at St. Anne's of following our King's lead. There's probably not a lot of glamor and glory in these sorts of endeavors, but that's not the point. The point is to be the hands and feet of the One who said to the criminal, "Today you will be with me in Paradise."

So aren't we glad God didn't give the people what they wanted? I honestly don't believe that God can usher in a perfect political system with his Messiah, and, if you want evidence of God's refusal to even attempt such a thing, look to the kingship of Jesus Christ. It is not a political kingship; it is, instead, a kingship of the heart, mind, and soul. And the hearts, minds, and souls so ruled by Christ work in their own ways to influence and improve societies one little bit at a time. The perfect world, much like the perfect church, comes only in the life to come. Until then, we follow Christ's example knowing that, in faith, this is all we can do.

The good news, though, is that Christ has so transformed our hearts, minds, and souls through the grace of his heavenly Father that we can live, love, and serve here on Earth, knowing that sin and death have been defeated for our sake. And from there we are free to serve as Christ the King calls us, not with the glamor of royalty, but with the humility of a servant. Conforming to expectations has its limits. Responding to needs does not. May we have the grace to not conform to such superficial trivialities, and to always respond to everyone crying out to remember them in Christ's kingdom.

Amen.