CHRIST THE KING SUNDAY

NOVEMBER 23, 2025
St. Timothy Lutheran Church, Portland, OR

THE LESSONS: Jeremiah 23:1-6; Luke 1:68-79; Colossians 1:11-20; Luke 23:33-43

THE SERMON: "Who Is This Strange… King?"

Grace and Peace to you in the NAME of GOD: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Introduction

There is an old parable told by the Danish philosopher-theologian Søren Kierkegaard that begins like this: there was once a mighty prince who fell in love with a young maiden. She was a commoner, living modestly in a small village within his kingdom. The prince was struck not only by her beauty but by her heart—humble, kind, and full of life. But he faced a great dilemma. How could he declare his love for her? If he rode to her village wearing his royal robes, surrounded by soldiers and trumpeters, she would certainly bow before him. She might even say "yes" to his proposal—but would she love him for who he was, or only because of his power? So the prince made a bold decision. He left his palace, took off his crown, and put on the clothes of a servant. He went to live among the people of her village—working, eating, laughing, and sharing life as they did. Only in that humility could he win her heart freely. The prince did not stop being a king—but he became one of them, so that his love could be real. God's love is real, and that is the Gospel.

Psalm: Luke 1:68–79, The Dawn from on High

Our reading today from the gospel of Luke is known as the Canticle of Zechariah (the *Benedictus*). It functions as a psalm—a song of praise—because Luke tells us that Zechariah sings this as prophecy and praise at the birth of his son, John. He praises God for raising "a horn of salvation" in the house of David. Then he says that the tender mercy of

God will cause “the dawn from on high to break upon us.” That dawn is Christ. When light breaks after a long night, it doesn’t come with noise or thunder—it simply arrives, quietly driving away darkness. In the same way, God’s power comes clothed in gentleness. Zechariah’s song continues: “to guide our feet into the way of peace.” Zechariah tells us that the King who has come close does not lead with domination but with mercy. He walks beside us, guiding us, not forcing us. Like the prince in Kierkegaard’s parable, God came to dwell among us in the person of Jesus. And throughout his ministry, Jesus showed us God’s love and mercy as he ministered to the poor and the outcast. And, Zechariah tells us that it is his son, John, later known as John the Baptist, who will be called the prophet of the Most High and who would go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give God’s people knowledge of salvation by the forgiveness of their sins.

Jeremiah 23:1-6, The Shepherd Who Comes Close

But that isn’t what the people heard when Jeremiah first wrote his prophecy. In our lesson, Jeremiah is speaking to a people ruled by false shepherds—leaders who scattered and neglected their flock. God addresses this immediately, warning those false shepherds: “Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! … Therefore thus says the Lord... It is you who have scattered my flock and have driven them away... So I will attend to you for your evil doings…” Indeed, God dealt with them, culminating in the exile in Babylon. But the Lord promises, even in the midst of judgment, a future King: “I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely.” In a time of political chaos and spiritual despair, Jeremiah gives this vision of a coming Shepherd-King who will gather the lost, rescue the wounded, and lead his people in safety. He will not rule with fear but with justice and compassion. And, although Jeremiah probably didn’t know he was writing about Jesus, early Christians must have gasped, “This sounds like Jesus,” when the priests read, “The days are surely coming… 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. In his days Judah will be saved…” Those early Christians knew that Jesus died as God’s lamb to take away the sin of the world. They knew that they were no longer separated from

God's love and mercy. They knew that God was with them. This prophecy points them, and us, to Jesus—the Prince who does not remain distant in royal halls but steps into the dust of our lives. Like Kierkegaard's prince, He took off His majesty and put on our humanity. God came and dwelt, and still dwells, among us.

Luke 23:33–43, The King on the Cross

But, our gospel lesson takes us to the place called Golgotha—The Skull—and there Jesus is crucified. The inscription above Him, placed by the Roman authorities, reads, "King of the Jews," and is intended as mockery. The leaders join in and taunt Jesus, "He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!" Soldiers laugh, the crowds jeer. Even one of the criminals hanging next to Jesus mocks him, "Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!" Yet on that cross, the true nature of His kingship is revealed. He reigns not by saving Himself, but by saving others. When the other criminal beside Him pleads, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom," the dying King gives the answer that still echoes with hope: "Today, you will be with me in paradise." The prince who became a servant now opens the door of His kingdom to a condemned man. That is royal mercy. That is love that rules by grace. Here on the cross we see the Prince unveiled for who He truly is. Even in the midst of all the chaos and noise, Jesus showed who he is when he prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."

Colossians 1:11-20, The Image of the Invisible God

Paul writes in his letter to the Colossians that Christ is "the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation." All things were made through Him and for Him, and yet He emptied Himself to reconcile all things to Himself through the cross. Here we see the great mystery of divine humility: the Creator of the galaxies kneels to wash the feet of His disciples. The Almighty becomes vulnerable. The righteous One bears our sin and shame so that we might share His inheritance of light. This is not weakness. It is the power of love—the kind that transforms hearts by drawing near, not by dominating from afar. Jesus has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into God's kingdom, because we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

And through him, God was pleased to reconcile to himself all people and all things by making peace through the blood of his cross.

The Call and the Challenge, Remember God is Near

Today's lessons tell us that God is near us. God is not off in some distant cosmos called "Heaven." While Heaven is where God reigns, Jesus showed us that God dwells among us. Kierkegaard's parable teaches that love cannot exist from a distance. God does not simply declare His affection from heaven. He moves in next door. He shares our table, our sorrows, our death—even our grave. And when Jesus rose and ascended, he didn't return to his palace and forget us. By His Spirit, He remains Emmanuel—God with us. Christ's kingship is not about control but communion. It is not about exaltation but incarnation. The Shepherd-King rules by presence. If we are citizens of this kingdom, our lives must reflect our King's humility. We are called to do what He did: to draw near to the suffering, to listen before we speak, to love before we judge, to serve before we seek status. To follow Him is to dethrone our pride and enthrone compassion. The true mark of His kingdom is this—wherever love stoops low, Christ is enthroned. The prince in Kierkegaard's story gave up luxury for love. Christ did infinitely more. He exchanged heaven for a manger, majesty for mortality, a crown of gold for a crown of thorns. Jeremiah said He would shepherd His people. Zechariah called Him the dawn. Paul called Him the image of God. The thief called Him King. And we call Him Lord—not because He commands from on high, but because He came down to dwell with us. So when you walk out of church today, remember: your King still comes close. The dawn still breaks. The Shepherd still gathers. The Cross still proclaims, "Today, you will be with Me in paradise." And, so, we proclaim Christ is King and we sing "Joy to the World" because the Lord has come! (*Joy to the World*, ELW 267)