

Pray: Lord God, you raise up Shepherds to lead us. Speak to us now of Jesus the Good Shepherd, who as we sing, "rules the world with truth and grace, and makes the nations prove the glories of his righteousness and wonders of his love." All praise to Christ who brings joy to this world, that you came to save. Amen.

Before we stuff ourselves with turkey and dressing or overindulge in shopping,
we pause at the Passion.

We must kneel at a cross before we journey toward a cradle.

Today is Christ the King Sunday.

The end of the church calendar reminds us that in the end of the age, Christ is enthroned by the right hand of God- as righteous judge, as just Shepherd.

The prophet Jeremiah tells us what leadership looks like in this reading.

The temporal leaders have failed to be good shepherds of God's people.

First, a warning.

Jeremiah 23:1-6

23:1 Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! says the LORD.

23:2 Therefore thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, concerning the shepherds who shepherd my people: It is you who have scattered my flock, and have driven them away, and you have not attended to them. So I will attend to you for your evil doings, says the LORD.

23:3 Then I myself will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the lands where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply.

23:4 I will raise up shepherds over them who will shepherd them, and they shall not fear any longer, or be dismayed, nor shall any be missing, says the LORD.

24:5 The days are surely coming, says the LORD, 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.

23:6 In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. And this is the name by which he will be called: "The LORD is our righteousness."

Luke 23:33-43

23:33 When 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.

23:34 Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." And they cast lots to divide his clothing.

23:35 And 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!"

23:36 The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine,

23:37 and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!"

23:38 There was also an inscription over him, "This is the King of the Jews."

23:39 One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, "Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!"

23:40 But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?"

23:41 And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong."

23:42 Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

23:43 He replied, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

Proclamation of the Word

What a coronation! Jesus on the cross. This coronation is like nothing the world has ever seen.

I was not around to watch the last big coronation of the Western world- the coronation of Elizabeth II in 1953.ⁱ

You may remember or at least watched the TV series *The Crown* to see a version.

Millions watched on TV as regiments marched, royalty gathered, and the entourage processed into Westminster Abbey.

Adorned in her velvet and ermine cloak, she heard the choir sing Psalm 122- "I was glad when they said unto me, let us go to the house of the LORD." as the trumpets blared.

She was handed an orb encrusted in gold, jewels and pearls.

Her scepter was studded with diamonds and sapphires.

Her royal ring of sapphire, ruby and 14 diamonds placed on her finger before St. Edward's Crown was placed on her head.

The Robe and mantel are placed upon her the Bishop spoke, "The Lord your God endue you with the knowledge, wisdom, and majesty of God on high. The LORD clothe you with the robes of righteousness and the garment of salvation."

She was given dozens of titles: Her Majesty, Defender of the Faith, Head of the Commonwealth among others.

The people including the Queen Mother swore allegiance to her.

And they all sang "God Save the Queen."

And she was whisked away in a golden carriage.

The post- WWII world rejoiced.

It was a drama- a display of wealth, power, might.

Consider Jesus' coronation in contrast.

His processional was crude- a death march.

He carried his own cross to a hilltop called the Skull
rather than a throne in a great cathedral.

He was stripped, mocked, derided- by the crowd, the soldiers,
even the other convicted criminal.

He was laughed at and the one title "King of the Jews," a put down,
was attached to the cross.

No choirs sang- only Jesus, in agony, cried out Psalm 22 "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

No ring was placed on his finger, only nails driven through his hands.

His crown was made of thorns.

His mother bowed in deep sorrow.

Mockers cried out "Save Yourself"- not "God Save the King."

They carried him away and placed him in a borrowed tomb.

They thought they were done with him.

Humiliation, shame and mockery was on full display.

Today is Christ the King Sunday.

It is not an ancient church tradition.

It began being observed in the mid 1920s, a practice instituted by Pope Pius XI out of a concern for the growing secularism and the rise of fascism in Europe.

Pope Pius XI's encyclical instituting the feast states, "When once men recognize, both in private and in public life, that Christ is King, society will at last receive the great blessings of real liberty, well-ordered discipline, peace and harmony."

Eventually, as Protestants adopted a liturgical calendar,
we started celebrating the Reign of Christ Sunday-

which is not surprising considering our crowning belief as Presbyterians is trust in the Sovereignty of God.

That sovereignty over-rules any tyrants- political or otherwise.

Yes, all leaders will be judged by God, we believe.

In the words from Jeremiah, leaders are Shepherds.

They are caretakers and stewards of God's people.

They pursue justice and righteousness, fairness.

So who is this Jesus, the Christ-King?

Jill Duffield beautifully sums him up this way.ⁱⁱ

*Jesus is the antithesis of dictators, bullies and power brokers.
King Jesus does not coerce or intimidate, use violence or bribery to get his way.
The One who rules heaven and earth hangs powerless on the cross for the sake of the ones
hanging beside him,
 both the criminal who recognizes him and the one who blasphemes him.
He takes on the sin of the spectators and the scoffers,
 the mockers and the deniers.
Jesus' reign of real liberty, well-ordered discipline, peace and harmony comes by
 way of the cross, ushered in through solidarity with the helpless and those
 who suffer unspeakable cruelty and pain.
Christ the King is like no other.
He came not to be served, but to serve.
He came not to stand apart from the least of these, but to take their place.
He came not to puff himself up but to pour himself out.*

*Jesus will be raised and sit at the right hand of God.
Jesus will defeat death, conquer sin and save the world not through military might and worldly
wealth but through vulnerable, sacrificial love.*

But in this scene of Scripture what is most impressive to me is that Jesus,
 suffering on the cross, chooses to offer forgiveness rather than revenge. When the criminal
asks him to remember him, he says you will be with me.

I just saw an interview with actor Mandy Patinkinⁱⁱⁱ, who played Inigo Montoya in the movie "The Princess Bride." He talks about the line that he loves the most from that film. If you recall, Montoya has been seeking to avenge his father's death. Most of us remember and know this line, "Hello, my name is Inigo Montoya. You killed my father. Prepare to die."

But he tells the interviewer that this is not the line he loves.

It is line he never noticed until now.

What 58 year-old Mandy noticed that 30 year-old Mandy did not.

The line is right when Buttercup falls in Andre's arms and Robin falls into his arm. He said it himself, but never really heard it.

"I have been in the revenge business for so long. Now that it's over, I do not know what to do with the rest of my life."

He states, "I love that line, and I love it for all of us, because the purpose of revenge... is completely worthless and pointless...purpose of existence is to embrace our fellow human being...to turn our darkness into light."

This week we kneel at a cross before we journey toward a cradle.
And no matter what makes you fall on your knees, Jesus is right there with us.

Whatever you bring to worship this week,
today we profess that Jesus is Prince of Peace, salvation for the sinner, the Head of the Church, and the Redeemer of all creation,

If you suffer from an overwhelming captivity to busyness, to work, to unhealth,
Jesus is the one who sits beside you and says, turn your focus on me,
I am the Truth that can set you free.

If you are worried about the state of the world or the well-being of a loved one,
Jesus is here saying, I am the Prince of Peace.

If you are laid bare by the troubles and trials of what lay before you,
Jesus offers Joy like no other.

No matter what holds you captive -
resentments, addiction, guilt, fear, or anything else in all creation -
Jesus is present, will never leave you orphaned.
No present powers can separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ.

If you are stuck in sin, by leaving things undone or by things you have done,
Jesus offers forgiveness and the power of the Spirit to begin again.

Jesus is crucified on a cross.

He does not seek revenge or return evil for evil.

What the mockers, skeptics, and the deriders miss is what they intend for harm, God uses for good.
And Jesus does not require a coronation like that of a King or Queen.

He is enthroned in our hearts.

Enthroned in the hearts of people who know they are forgiven and freed...

...of people who know the comfort and peace of God who climbs down in the ditch with us and lifts us from our sorrows.

...of people who serve the vulnerable and the suffering
who know best that we are closest to Christ when serving on our knees.

Jesus is enthroned in the minds and wills of those who serve as Shepherds over people promoting justice and righteousness especially for the broken, the sinner, the vulnerable among us.
Jesus is a King like no other.

He is the one who deserves our highest allegiance, our deepest praise, our heartfelt thanks.

He is the Good Shepherd, the standard for all who have charge over others.

And as we pattern our lives after his, we will know abundant life.

I believe it is true, what Pope Pius stated, "When once men (and women) recognize, both in private and in public life, that Christ is King, society will at last receive the great blessings of real liberty, well-ordered discipline, peace and harmony."

May it be so.

ⁱ Thanks to James Howell's sermon ideas for this contrast of images in his blog.

<http://jameshowellsweeklypreachingnotions.blogspot.com/>

ⁱⁱ Jill Duffield, "Looking into the Lectionary," November 19, 2019, *Presbyterian Outlook*.

ⁱⁱⁱ Interview with Many Patankin - Watch

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s_t3uDVPiRc&feature=youtu.be&fbclid=IwAR1Z2UQpQ4h2OxZnM986DPmzzEw2tjS8XBc0-WGOB-cHtBYwiPSFqmYb48