

11.23.25 Christ the King

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Jeremiah 23:1-6; Psalm 46; Colossians 1:11-20; Luke 23:33-43

“New Year’s Resolutions”

Let us begin with prayer.

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen

So here we are at the last Sunday of the church year.

What do **you** do on the last day of the calendar year? Many of us have parties. We dress up. We celebrate. We wear colorful hats, with the little elastics that itch and dig into your chin. We eat too much and possibly drink too much and at the stroke of midnight we sing the traditional songs.

I’ll bet most of you know "Auld Lang Syne", often sung at New Year's Eve to reflect on the past year and old friendships. It’s a tradition rooted in Scottish culture that has spread globally. The song had been around for many years but it was standardized by Robert Burns, in 1788 and translates to "for old time's sake" or "old long since" and encourages people to remember friends and experiences before moving into a new year.

But the bottom line is that it is traditionally a time of celebration.

Yet here we are at Christ the King Sunday and our Gospel reading describes the crucifixion!

Now we know the end of the story – but the path to that culmination is tragic and violent and bloody. How do we resolve that tension between a traditional celebration and the Cross?

We know that the Jewish people through the ages were hoping for the emergence of a Messiah. A figure who would rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem, bring about the end of war so that everyone can live in peace and unite all people regardless of differences like religion or culture. At

the same time, they hoped for a Savior – a King – a military leader to save them from stronger forces like the Romans who persecuted them. Someone who would be all things to all people. Yea, that never seems to happen.

Jesus himself rejected the title of king in a political, worldly sense, as when the crowds tried to make him king in John 6:15 or when Pilate asked if he was the King of the Jews. He did not want to be seen as a political ruler, like the tyrants of his time, because his kingdom was not of this world, as stated in John 18:36. Instead, he came to be a spiritual king, ruling over a kingdom of God characterized by compassion, service, and freedom.

In those last moments on the Cross, Jesus modeled for us the compassion and forgiveness of a loving God. Jesus asked God to forgive without naming for whom he was praying. It is easy to see that he was praying for the thief hanging next to him and likely praying for forgiveness of the Roman soldiers who were carrying out his persecution. He knew they were only cogs in a larger system and power structure that was ultimately responsible for his death. But Jesus the Son of God was also born and raised as a Jew in the Greco-Roman culture. He knew how the Roman legal system worked. He knew that in order for him to be crucified, there had to be cooperation with others who were willing to carry out his prosecution. Ultimately, Jesus was executed by the Roman government. However, select Jewish leaders cooperated by bringing charges against him. Since Jesus knew well and understood the systems and structures at play, his prayer for forgiveness was for everyone who in any way participated in his crucifixion. He asked God to forgive them because they did not know what they were doing. They did not know that he was the Son of God, and they certainly did not know that his death would fulfill a greater purpose.

Just as God forgave those who crucified Jesus, God will forgive us. God knows we are all products of interrelated webs of power and influence. God knows that we are each socialized into structures and social mores that form our beliefs about race, class, gender and gender identity,

ethnicity, nationality, and religious beliefs. God knows that our actions are influenced by our beliefs and our beliefs are often flawed. However, being products of our environments does not exonerate us of responsibility for our actions and from experiencing the consequences thereof. There is a familiar saying that we think comes from a collection of sayings from ancient Jewish Rabbis.

“Do not be daunted by the enormity of the world's grief.

Do justly, now.

Love mercy, now.

Walk humbly, now.

You are not obligated to complete the work, but neither are you free to abandon it.”

Being forgiven does mean that God forgives us and will give us the strength and determination to repent and live up to our obligations to live life anew. So how do we prepare ourselves for the new church year – for the coming Advent season – for Thanksgiving and Christmas?

Instead of waiting for December 31, why not think about New Year’s Resolutions for the new year in God’s kingdom? We can look at the Beatitudes – Jesus holds up the merciful, the peacemakers, those who are righteous and the pure in heart. When he spoke of the Good Samaritan as an illustration of the “Good Neighbor”, we are told to “Go and do likewise”.

We have a legacy that has been given to us. We are the hands and feet of Jesus in the world. As we are fed this morning with the very body and blood of our Savior, let our souls be fed as well that we may be given the strength and the will to follow the example of our Lord.

Amen

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