

Home Service for November 23, 2025

Welcome and Announcements

For the next two weeks there will not be any Home Services. Next week we are “Hanging the Greens” and hope you can join us online or in person. The following week I need to attend a grandson’s birthday. Hopefully you have received your Advent Devotional.

You may also find listening to some of your favorite hymns helpful in worship.

Call to Worship:

Blessed be the Holy One, who looks upon us with love and mercy. Blessed be the Holy One, who sent us a Savior to rescue us from despair. Blessed be the Holy One and God’s beloved Child, who rules in a realm of forgiveness and peace. Blessed be the Holy One, who is worthy of our worship.

Opening Prayer:

Come once again, and feed your flock like a shepherd. Come once again, and gather up the children, the oppressed, the sick, the lonely, the humble, and the rejected of the earth. Turn our hearts to the least of your children, for if we lose them, we become lost. Reconcile us to you and to those we have hurt. On this Christ the King Sunday, join us together with neighbors, with strangers, and especially with our own household. Bring us to your light in our time of darkness, through your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prayer of Confession:

Imagining your reign can be difficult, eternal God. It is difficult to picture a world governed by your justice and righteousness alone. Our minds are held captive by the worst images of human kings, rulers, and powers. When nobler visions fail and we settle for kingdoms of our own making, correct and forgive us. Free the borders of our imaginations, that we may envision your greater good and celebrate the coming of your reign on earth as in heaven. Amen.

Words of Assurance:

Hear the prophecy of Zechariah: Tender mercy and forgiveness are the ways of God. We are forgiven. Let the church say, Amen.

Read Luke 1:68-79

“Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel,
because he has come to his people and redeemed them.
69 He has raised up a horn^[a] of salvation for us
in the house of his servant David
70 (as he said through his holy prophets of long ago),
71 salvation from our enemies
and from the hand of all who hate us—
72 to show mercy to our ancestors
and to remember his holy covenant,
73 the oath he swore to our father Abraham:
74 to rescue us from the hand of our enemies,
and to enable us to serve him without fear
75 in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.
76 And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High;
for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him,
77 to give his people the knowledge of salvation
through the forgiveness of their sins,
78 because of the tender mercy of our God,
by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven
79 to shine on those living in darkness
and in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the path of peace.”

Prayers of the People:

Patient God, we seem to think that being people of faith is a campaign for your favor. We posture and make gestures of holiness and grace, but then we easily slide back into habits of self-centeredness. Yet you have forgiven us, each time, calling us beloved children. Today we are about to complete the journey of this Christian year, during which we have learned of the witness of Jesus Christ, the birth and growth of the church, and the great lessons of the Hebrew Scriptures. This year has been an opportunity for us to renew our acquaintance with all those who have gone before, who have been faithful disciples. Help us take these lessons into our hearts and lives. Let the reign of Jesus Christ, your beloved Son, our Savior, be evident in all that we say, think, and do. Give us the confidence and courage to truly be your witnesses all the rest of our days. We thank you for hearing and answering the prayers that we have lifted up to you each week this last

year. Let us never forget the power of prayer in our lives and may we always feel Your presence as we pray. For we offer this prayer in the name of Jesus Christ. AMEN.

Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day, our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is The kingdom, and the power and the glory forever and ever. AMEN

Read the Lesson: Jeremiah 23:1-6

“Woe to the shepherds who are destroying and scattering the sheep of my pasture!” declares the Lord. ² Therefore this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says to the shepherds who tend my people: “Because you have scattered my flock and driven them away and have not bestowed care on them, I will bestow punishment on you for the evil you have done,” declares the Lord. ³ “I myself will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them and will bring them back to their pasture, where they will be fruitful and increase in number. ⁴ I will place shepherds over them who will tend them, and they will no longer be afraid or terrified, nor will any be missing,” declares the Lord.

⁵ “The days are coming,” declares the Lord,
“when I will raise up for David^[a] a righteous Branch,
a King who will reign wisely
and do what is just and right in the land.

⁶ In his days Judah will be saved
and Israel will live in safety.

This is the name by which he will be called:
The Lord Our Righteous Savior.

Read the Epistle Lesson: Colossians 1:11-20

being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, ¹² and giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you^[a] to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light. ¹³ For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into

the kingdom of the Son he loves, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

¹⁵ The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. ¹⁶ For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. ¹⁷ He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. ¹⁹ For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, ²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

Read the Gospel Lesson: Luke 23:33-43

When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him there, along with the criminals—one on his right, the other on his left. ³⁴ Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”^[a] And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.

³⁵ The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, “He saved others; let him save himself if he is God’s Messiah, the Chosen One.”

³⁶ The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar ³⁷ and said, “If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself.”

³⁸ There was a written notice above him, which read: this is the king of the jews.

³⁹ One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: “Aren’t you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!”

⁴⁰ But the other criminal rebuked him. “Don’t you fear God,” he said, “since you are under the same sentence? ⁴¹ We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.”

⁴² Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”^[b]

⁴³ Jesus answered him, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

Message

Our Gospel takes us back to Good Friday. In the events leading up to the crucifixion of Jesus, from his betrayal by Judas in the garden, from the kangaroo court before the high priests, to his unjust condemnation by Pontius Pilate, to the Roman soldiers who rolled the dice for Jesus’ clothing, it seemed that nothing went right that day. But finally, as the events which ended in Jesus’ death came to its conclusion, there was one thing that Pilate did get right: That was the message which he had posted on top of the cross, “This is the king of the Jews.” When the

Jewish leaders protested, requesting that Pilate change the words, Pilate's response to them was, "What I have written, I have written." Pilate may have written this sign to ridicule the Jewish leaders but in doing so he made a bold statement. Without knowing it Pilate told all who were present at the crucifixion that Jesus is the King of the Jews. He is a king the world does not recognize and he is a king that can take us to paradise.

Today is Christ the King Sunday. It is the last Sunday celebrated in our church year. This is the day when we celebrate the fact that Jesus is our king. He is the ultimate king. He is far above any human authorities, far above any of the other heavenly beings. He rules this universe in an awesome way. But He rules in such an understated way and his time spent on this earth was such a humble act of service that many are unable to or refuse to accept Jesus as their king.

The Gospel tells us, "The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, "He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Christ of God, the Chosen One." The people did not recognize Jesus as their King sent by God. They mocked and insulted him. They challenged him to come down from the cross if he is the Christ, God's chosen one.

God promised long ago that he would send his people a king who would redeem them. Jeremiah wrote, "The days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land." God's promise was fulfilled in the bloodied and beaten man that was hanging on the cross, but the people did not recognize Jesus as the chosen one of God.

If there ever was a king that the world did not recognize, it was Jesus. To be treated and convicted like the worst of criminals! To receive the most extreme punishment given out by the government of that day! To have the very people you came to save stand in front of you and hurl insults at you. A true king would never be treated like this.

To the eyes of the unbelieving world there was no way that Jesus was the king that they were waiting for. How could this beaten man be the king of the Jews? The Jewish leaders and the people wanted proof that Jesus was their king. In their stubborn unbelief the people could not see that by their own words they were proving that Jesus was the promised king sent by God. They could not see that by suffering and dying on the cross Jesus was doing what the Christ, the Chosen One was sent here to do.

The people were looking for a king with a crown on his head. Jesus did not have a crown of gold around his brow. Crowning his kingly head is a twisted band of

cruel thorns mashed down into his scalp and shredding his skin. The people wanted a king seated on a gold-covered, jewel-decorated high and lofty throne. The throne that lifts this king above his subjects is the cross to which he is nailed.

Jesus came into this world to take our sins upon himself and to pay the penalty for those sins. This was God's will that Jesus suffer instead of us. God in his mercy sent his Son to die on Calvary's cross so that we would no longer be ruled by sin and death. Because Jesus suffered and poured out his blood for you and me, all of our sins have been washed away. Our king went into battle with sin and defeated sin by sacrificing his own life instead of ours. Jesus by dying on the cross proved himself to be the king of the Jews and our king as well. He is a king that takes us to his kingdom. He is a king that takes us to paradise.

Not all the people around Jesus that day failed to see the king that was dying for them, but there was one there that started out as an unbeliever, for we see a drastic change take effect in one of the thieves that were crucified with Jesus. This nameless man who hung on a cross next to Jesus is called simply a criminal by Luke. His crimes were evidently not small but big and serious, judging from the fact that he was being crucified for them. But although this dying thief was a notorious sinner, he was also, by the grace of God, a repentant sinner; that is evident from his confession. The man said, "Don't you fear God since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong."

By the grace and mercy of God, the Holy Spirit brought him to a true knowledge of his sins and of the just punishment he deserved. But he had not only come to know his sins but also to know his Savior. To be sure, he had not been with Jesus very long, only a few hours, but it was long enough. He watched him suffer patiently and heard him pray for forgiveness for his executioners. He listened to the mocking words of those who passed by the cross and of the Jewish leaders who stood under it gloating. The thief clearly understood from Jesus' words that he was not suffering for any crime he had done. Jesus was on a cross simply because he claimed to be the promised Messiah and the Son of God.

The thief saw the sign over the cross, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." And through it all the Holy Spirit led him to recognize and to believe in Jesus of Nazareth as the King of the Jews, the promised Messiah, Son of God and long-awaited Savior-King, who had come in the fullness of time to die for the sins of the world. And in such God-given faith, he asked Jesus, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

How did the Savior respond to the criminal's plea? Just as we would expect a merciful Savior to respond. He heard him and gave him even more than he asked for. He had asked to be remembered and Jesus assured him: "Today you will be with me in paradise." It assured him of forgiveness for all his sins, black and ugly though they were. It assured him of eternal life in heaven without any merits or works or doing on his part of any kind but solely by the free grace of a gracious God. It gave that thief real comfort in his last hours of life and sure hope in the face of death.

We also have the same hope and comfort. God tells us that all who believe in his Son will have everlasting life in the kingdom of heaven. God tells us that Jesus is our Savior and King too. He was wounded and bruised for us, he took our place and bore the sins of the world, he suffered our punishment and he paid our debt to God in full. Jesus' blood atoned for the sins of the world, and that includes each and every one of our sins. He opened the gates of paradise not only for the dying thief, but also for you and me. Through faith in Christ all that he accomplished is ours.

Pilate was not totally correct, because Jesus is not only king of the Jews. Jesus is the king of all people. Take comfort in knowing this. Our king has promised to never leave us or forsake us. He promises that he will control all things for our good. And he gives us the same promise that he gave to the thief hanging next to him. Our king promises and tells us, "You will be with me in paradise." Amen.

Benediction:

Though the days increase in their darkness, the Lord of light and love reigns supreme. May the power of God's love be in your hearts and reflected in your lives now and always. Go in peace, and may God's peace be with you. AMEN.