

Year C Reign of Christ Your Majesty, I Choose You Luke 23 vv33 to 43

This seems an odd passage of Scripture to use as the Gospel reading for the Sunday on which we proclaim Jesus Christ as Saviour and King of the whole world. Saviour and King are words that, in worldly terms, may, for example, conjure up images of a white knight on a huge, beautiful stallion, coming to the rescue of a village held by tyrants. Then, this white knight takes off his helmet to reveal that he's their king...not tucked away in his castle but fighting on his brave steed. Kings are rich – hugely rich – and they have castles, not just one castle. And kings are dressed in fine clothes that cost a fortune and they eat big, fancy, expensive meals, and so on and so on.

This is most definitely not the kind of saviour and king we find in our Gospel story today but we do find a Saviour and King...a Saviour and King who will save not just one small village but the whole world. No matter how nice a worldly king is, no matter how generous, no matter how many hospitals or schools or libraries are named after him because of his titles and good works, an earthly king will never save the world because an earthly king is still the embodiment of worldly power. And worldly power will always build their power on position, property, and pocketbook.

Once a great king decided to share his wealth with his subjects. He had a spacious compound created in front of his castle and marked it off with a large fence. In the compound he placed all his treasures. At its center he positioned his throne. He sat down and called his subjects together.

The king announced: "I am about to share all of my treasures with you. Choose whatever you wish in this compound, and it is yours. Choose wisely, and do not leave the area until I have dismissed you."

His subjects began to scramble over his possessions, taking whatever they wished. In the hubbub, an old woman, small in stature and great in years, approached the king to ask: “Your majesty, have I understood you correctly? If I choose *anything* in the compound, it will be mine? The king assured her that she had understood and invited her to choose wisely.

The old woman paused a moment in thought. Then she looked hard at the king and said: “Your majesty, I choose *you!*” The crowd grew silent at her words, waiting to hear the king’s response. The king smiled at the woman and said: “You have chosen most wisely. Because you chose me, all my kingdom will be yours as well.” There was abundant joy in the land that day, for the old woman was much loved, and everyone shared in the king’s treasure. (story from p.236-7 of *Augsburg Sermons 3*)

Your majesty, I choose you. While the people around us are scrambling to get their hands on as much worldly goods as is humanly possible, we choose the king. I once saw a lovely leather jacket that had, on the back, the motto embodying the thinking of this world: The one who dies with the most toys, wins. I have said this many times but I will say it again today – and keep saying it: This is the thinking drilled into us by society. We are “successful” when we have stuff. Two people stand side-by-side, one with a car, a house, two grown kids with careers of their own while the other is holding a sign that says, “Hungry, will work for food.” If I asked you which one of those people was “successful”, which person would you point to? Chances are, you would point to the person who has a home, and a car, and kids with careers. Both people are living, both are reasonably healthy, both are human beings. Why is the one with the money and property said to be successful while the poor person is said to be unsuccessful? Successful in what? Unsuccessful in what? Those who operate according to the world’s thinking of power, those who

accumulate position, property, and a padded pocketbook, those are the ones we call “successful”. Success in our world is not measured in who was the nicest, who was the most compassionate, who helped the most people. Success in our world is measured by status, by wealth. I would bet, that without too much trouble, you would be able to give me the name of a billionaire – maybe even two or three names. But could you tell me the name of the 2022 winner of the Nobel Peace Prize? (Ales Bialiatski, Memorial, and Center for Civil Liberties) How about the 2022 winner of the Nobel Prize for Medicine? (Svante Paablo)

Your majesty, I choose you. When we choose Christ as our King, what are we choosing? First, choosing Christ means rejecting the world’s thinking of power and success. It means that, instead of choosing a king with fine clothes filling his closet, we choose a king whose clothes were taken from him, given to the winner of a dice throw while the king hung naked on a cross. We choose a king who tells us not to worry about what we are going to wear, a king who says if you have two coats give one to the person who has none, a king whose people share all things in common so that everyone has enough.

When we choose Christ as King it means that, instead of dining on fine food with friends and family, we choose a king who breaks bread with the rejected, the sick, the poor – those not wanted at the table of the rich. We choose a king who abundantly feeds the hungry crowds and who willingly gives himself as the food that will always nourish, the drink that will always quench thirst and never run dry.

When we choose Christ as King, instead of being served his every whim by a multitude of servants, we choose the king who got on his knees and washed the feet of his disciples – even the one who betrays him; the king whose hands touch

and heal the sick, the king whose hands welcome the unwelcome of society and serve them bread.

When we choose Christ as King, instead of the king who goes to war to conquer with physical strength, we choose the king who conquers with his word – his word of love for everyone, justice for everyone. We choose a king who does not throw offenders into jail but, rather, invites them to his table and forgives them before they even ask. As our king hung on the cross, he forgives the ones who put him there, the ones who operate and thrive on worldly power are forgiven even as our king dies to right the wrong they have caused with their way of life.

Your majesty, I choose you. When we choose Christ as our King, we are choosing life in his kingdom. A kingdom where all the qualities of Christ bear fruit: where the desire to help others, the desire to love and to share replaces the desire to accumulate money and property and status. It is a life of inclusion, a life of healing, a life of forgiveness. It is a life of humility and serving, a life of loving and respecting all others. It is a life that is, very often, rejected.

It was rejected then and it is still rejected today. Jesus is a King who doesn't fit the world's idea of a king. He rules a kingdom that doesn't fit the world's idea of a kingdom. "The leaders scoffed at him, saying, 'He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!' The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine, and saying, 'If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!' They scoffed, they mocked, they scorned this king's seeming lack of power.

But this seeming lack of power was actually the immense power to love, to forgive, to include – the power to bridge the gap between humanity and God, to bring all

things into relationship with God, the power to give life to those who choose life. The people stood by and watched while those with worldly power ridiculed our king. "Save yourself and us!" the one criminal cries. What he didn't understand, and what the ones holding the world's power didn't understand, was that by not saving himself he was saving them. The other criminal understood. This criminal watched and made his choice...remember me when you come into your kingdom. Your majesty, he said, I choose you.

This isn't such an odd passage of Scripture for the Reign of Christ after all. It is a story of the crucified Christ. It is the story of how Rome treats defeated kings with public performances of humiliation. What they do not realize is that their action works into God's story of our salvation. Only those on the margin can testify to its truth. One of the criminals, rightfully condemned, recognizes Jesus' innocence and asks for mercy. Later, one Roman centurion will acknowledge the truth that what appears to be a loss is actually a victory. It is a story in which Jesus' identity as Messiah is called into question. What kind of king – who is supposed to be the Messiah – has no riches, no army, and is shamefully killed on a cross? What sort of king is he?

We have answered that question. We know what kind of king he is. We say we choose him as our king. In fact, in our baptisms we gave ourselves to him – we are Christ's own forever. But that is a hard promise to keep, a difficult choice to maintain day by day. We, as Christ's body, bear this king to the world but it is a world that mocks such kings with no material riches. We, as Christ's body, reveal his kingdom to the world but it is a world that scoffs at a kingdom where love replaces money, where sharing replaces accumulating, where equality replaces status. It is extremely difficult to live according to the ways of God's kingdom, to

be Christ for others and to see Christ in others. We are pulled toward the world's ways because it is the world's ways that seem to be dominating. Life in God's kingdom is, at the moment, not an easy life – it is not a life of leisure and luxury, it is a life of fighting the system, righting the wrongs, sharing the little we have, and loving those the world does not love. Last week, Jesus told us how difficult life will be. The people with worldly power fight to keep that power because they are the ones living the lives of leisure and luxury right now. But, last week, Jesus also told us that, although the going is rough, not one hair of heads will perish. By our endurance we will gain our souls.

Choosing Christ is not an easy choice. It is a choice that requires work, hard work, to live into every day. Jesus told us earlier in Luke's Gospel that, "From everyone to whom much has been given [which is us], much will be required; and from the one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded" (12:48b). Each one of us, a living stone will, together with God, reveal a kingdom built on love, wholeness, equality, and inclusion, where all things, whether on earth or in heaven, are reconciled to God in perfect peace. This is hard to live into. It means letting go of ideas, and attitudes, and stuff that are dear to us. But, we choose life when we say, "Your majesty, I choose you."