

KING OF THE JEWS

A SERMON FOR CHRIST THE KING SUNDAY
NOVEMBER 24, 2013
FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
MARIANNA, FLORIDA
TED W. LAND, INTERIM PASTOR

LUKE 23:33-43

What's the darkest day, the worst day, you can remember? For some, this Friday marked the 50th anniversary of that day, the day that President John F. Kennedy was assassinated. For others, it is Pearl Harbor Day, December 7, 1941. For many, it is September 11, 2001.

These are dates that we remember. These are dates that mark the world changing forever, noting ever being quite the same as it was the day before.

The day Christ died on the cross for the sins of the world was one of those days.

I suppose, as we come to the close of the church year, as we begin to prepare for advent, it is appropriate that we look at how the story ends on the last Sunday of the liturgical year.

The life of Jesus of Nazareth ended on a Friday afternoon. It was on top of a hill, a hill variously called Calvary, and Golgotha, the place of the skull.

Previously, they had beaten Jesus nearly to death, and had mocked and ridiculed Him, placing a robe of royal purple on his bloody back and shoulders, and placing a cruel crown of thorns upon His head. But Pontius Pilate, perhaps in retaliation for the crowd going against his desire to turn Jesus loose, instructed those who took Him to the place of execution to prepare a sign, written in Latin, Greek, and Hebrew, that told who this man was: Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews.

Even as He hung on the cross, the crowd mocked Him.

And the soldiers at the foot of the cross, perhaps the same ones that had beaten Him, enrobed Him, crowned Him, insulted Him by saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!"

Jesus was not the only one sentenced to die that day. Two criminals, thieves, robbers, murderers perhaps, hung on either side of Him.

One joined in the mockery, the ridicule, the insults. But the other defended Jesus, and called upon Jesus to remember him when He came into His kingdom.

And Jesus uttered those words that mean so much to me and perhaps to you: "Truly, I tell you, today, you will be with me in paradise."

The King of the Jews, mocked, ridiculed, insulted, crucified, is also the King of Heaven.

Those who believe in Him, those who trust in Him, those who profess their faith in Him as their Lord and Savior, live and die in the hope of heaven.

Someday, someone, somewhere, is going to ask if you are saved. When they do, if you believe in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, if you trust in Him, if you profess your faith in Him, if you live in the hope of heaven, just say, "Yes."

When that person gets pushy and personal, and asks, "When were you saved?" answer them this way: "It was a Friday afternoon, in the Spring of the year, about 3 o'clock in the afternoon."

If they ask where you were saved, tell them it was on a mountain with two or three different names: Calvary, Golgotha, the Skull.

Or just start singing, "On a hill, far away, stood an old rugged cross, the emblem of suffering and shame, and I love that old cross where the dearest and best, for a world of lost sinners was slain. So I'll cherish the old rugged cross, till my trophies at last I lay down. I will cling to that old rugged cross, and exchange it someday for a crown."

That crown will be a victor's crown, not a crown of thorns, and it will represent our victory over sin and death, our victory in Jesus.

Understand, we aren't saved because we are worthy, because we are not. We aren't saved because we are sinless, because we are not. We aren't saved because we are blameless, because we are not. We are saved because the King of the Jews, the Messiah, the Chosen one of God, God's only begotten son, died for our sins.

But that isn't the end of the story. The gospel doesn't end on the top of a hill outside Jerusalem, near the town garbage dump. It ends with an empty tomb and a risen Lord, and the hope of life everlasting fulfilled.

The promise to the thief on the cross that he would be with Jesus is a beginning, not an ending. It is the beginning for him of a life free from pain, free from sin, free from whatever demons, forces, abuses, needs, caused him to choose to live as he had lived which caused him to die as he died. Like Jesus, he died on a cross. Unlike Jesus, he deserved it.

And yet...there was a place for Him in paradise, in Christ's kingdom, in the kingdom of heaven.

Praise my soul the king of heaven, to His feet thy tribute bring. Ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven, evermore his praises sing. Alleluia, alleluia, praise the everlasting King.

Amen, and amen.