

November 22—Christ the King Sunday

Matthew 27:27-31

*27 Then the governor's soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole company of soldiers around him. 28 They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, 29 and then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand and knelt in front of him and mocked him. "Hail, king of the Jews!" they said. 30 They spit on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again. 31 After they had mocked him, they took off the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him.*

### **Jesus Christ is the King who conquered evil**

Kings in the Bible were to care for their people like shepherds who treasured and protected their lambs. Shepherds here in the Four Corners area know their sheep. They value them. Their sheep recognize their voice and follow them. Sometimes the sheep even become pets.

Jesus is the Good Shepherd—the Shepherd King—who gave his life for his lambs. More than a shepherd, he is also the lamb who gave himself as sacrifice to rescue us from the power of sin, Satan, and death. John the Baptist had called Jesus “the lamb of God” who takes away the sin of the world.

At daybreak on Good Friday the Jewish religious council formally convicted Jesus of mocking God and sentenced him to death. To carry out their sentence legally they also needed the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, to concur, and so early that morning they brought Jesus before Pilate. While this was happening, a short distance away Jewish priests were offering a lamb in the temple, something they did every day. Possibly the pleasant odor of the meat cooking on the altar wafted over to where Jesus stood.

Unlike the lamb sacrificed in the temple, Jesus did not die quickly. He was tortured. The brutality the Roman soldiers, at the direction of Pilate, went over the top. They were not just carrying out orders, they revealed the depths to which evil can descend. The Gospel of Matthew confronts us with an example of the evil brutality of the Roman soldiers, we must also recognize the evil that lurks in our sinful nature as well. We turn our eyes then from the soldiers to the one they brutalized; we see **how our eternal King Jesus Christ conquered evil.**

#### 1. The terrible depth of evil (27-30)

If we had been there with Jesus; we would have averted our eyes horrified by the brutality, the total depravity of those soldiers and Pilate who commanded them.

They carried out their orders with manic glee stripping him of his seamless cloak, that one keepsake a soldier would later claim by lot while Jesus hung on the cross. They draped over his shoulders a scarlet robe, likely the red tunic used by the soldiers. They acted as if Jesus was a commander, like Pilate, even a king. The red cloth covered Jesus' bleeding back after they had whipped him nearly to death.

A king needs a crown. Watch the soldiers laughing as they gather some thorns, twist them together and shove them on his head.

A king needs a scepter. For this king, any stick will do. They force it into his hand and mock him; you could translate: “they played with Jesus as if he were a child.” Beaten, humiliated, Jesus looks like a

clown. Bowing in mock reverence, they exclaim, “Hail, King of the Jews.” To the soldiers, Jesus is a joke. They spit on him, grab the stick, and beat him on the head.

This terrible, brutal spectacle Pilate will now bring before the mob. “Behold the man.” He is no threat. He is a joke, a clown, not worth killing. You have had your vengeance. Let him go.

Why the brutality? Contempt would be one reason. The soldiers are powerful. They have weapons, spears, and armor. Their god is the Emperor Tiberius who lives in magnificent palace and has a villa at Capri on a seashore. He commands legions. He governs an empire the size of the United States. The Jews are weak, divided, and helpless. The soldiers and Pilate think the Jews’ complaint about Jesus is a joke. The Jews worship a God no one can see, they think. They do see God made flesh. Blinded by evil they think him a farce.

Hatred is another reason. Although commanded by a Roman governor and led by Roman officers, the soldiers likely came from Damascus in Syria, and maybe even from Samaria. Syrians and Samaritans hated the Jews, who would walk around Samaria rather than go through it, and who would walk around the Roman city Tiberius on the Sea of Galilee rather than through it. The soldiers saw how Jews refused to enter non-Jewish homes. Recall how even after Pentecost the Holy Spirit had to drive Peter into the home of a Roman centurion so that the man and his family could learn about Jesus Christ (Acts 10). Remember how another Roman officer did not want Jesus to enter his home to heal his servant, even though he had built a synagogue for the Jews (Luke 7:4-7). The soldiers who brutalized Jesus resented the Jews—Jesus included.

It is hard to look at the soldiers’ hatred and brutality. We might close our eyes to the hatred, anger, resentment, theft, abuse, and brutality in our country and beyond. We would also avert our eyes from the evil that lies within us as well. It is hard to admit that we too can fall into darkness—that our thoughts turn at times to pride, contempt, resentment, anger and even hatred.

If Romans, Syrians, and Samaritans did not get along with the Jews, we see racial division in our country today as well. In Scripture the Holy Spirit leads us to understand that disciples of Christ cannot be a party to bigotry. In Scripture God tells us that only about 180 generations ago after the Flood, we all descended from one family: Noah and his wife. We are related. The genetic differences among us are slight. Far more importantly, we have one God who loves us all of us the same. We have one Savior; we have one Holy Spirit who dwells in us alike. Before God we are one family, with one heavenly Father.

We are headed to an eternal home, where we will join “a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb” (Revelation 7:9).

We should know better; and we do. But we still fight our sinful nature. We would pick at small differences among us, not just ethnic differences, other ones also: One person has more possessions than I; this person’s life seems easier than mine. That person struggles with a sin, and we would look on with contempt rather than try to help. We find ourselves judging the motives even though we cannot know what another person is thinking. We would act like the pharisee in the temple who thanks God he is not like other sinful people.

Our sinful nature would beat Jesus on the head with a stick, shove a crown of thorns on his head, and ridicule him as useless, as if he were not worth our time.

## 2. He took the evil to Golgotha (31)

Then, look at Jesus again. See him after the soldiers finished their buffoonery. Look at Jesus standing beside Pilate before the mob when and says, “behold the man.” See him now wearing his own robe, stained with blood from beating. See him crowned with thorns. See how he has taken on himself tortuous evil, see how he has taken onto himself brutality, hatred, contempt, and resentment.

Then follow Jesus as the solders lead him to Golgotha, with the cross over his shoulder. See him as the lamb who goes uncomplaining forth.

See him as the Lamb who takes away the sin of the world. See him and realize he is, in fact, the King of the Jews. More than that, he is our King.

Jesus is the King who countless Christians for nearly 20 centuries have known and confessed as their Savior. Those soldiers who thought they were in charge? We do not know them; their names are lost. The men who thought Jesus had no value are the ciphers who merely represent the evil that infests all people, including us, in some manner. How many soldiers were there in that company who beat and mocked Jesus? 600? A few hundred? We do not know. They do not matter, their kingdom died with them unless they repented and turned to the King of the Jews for salvation. And Pilate? His name Christians do remember. Every Sunday for nearly two thousand years, Christians speak the words in the Apostle’s Creed that Jesus was crucified “under Pontius Pilate.” His name lives in infamy. We worship the one Pilate mocked. We worship the King of the Jews.

We worship Jesus and we trust in him because we see his love. Love—even for those who beat and mocked him, even for Pilate, even for the crowd who screamed for his blood, even for the Jewish council who plotted and engineered his death, even for us.

More than love, we are forgiven, our sins have been washed away. In him we are freed from the contempt, hatred and resentment that would rule our hearts and lives. In him we are freed to love him, and for him we are freed to bear hostility because he gave his life for us. Jesus is our King. He rules in our hearts; he impacts our conduct, our attitudes, our values. He is our King who rules the entire universe to protect us. He hears our pleas and prayers for help. He receives our worship. He rules our lives and rules the world for us now; he reigns in heaven forever. Amen.