

Pastor Jonna Bohigian    November 24, 2019  
Christ Is King!  
Luke 23:33 – 43

Hope. Perhaps it's because I'm getting older, or perhaps because it's the mantra of every generation, but I have never seen the need for hope *more* than today. When I see my good friends getting divorced, some dying much too young, others unable to have children, still others miscarrying, broken families, job loss, and young people who are so depressed and anxious that they commit death by suicide, it is impossible *not* to feel overwhelmed. When these pains begin to happen in *my* life, it is difficult to feel hopeful; there is *so much* pain and sadness in this life, and there is *so much* out of my control.

We *need* hope. We are *desperate* for it. As the ground is desperate for rain, so we are *desperate* for hope.

And this is why we have the Scripture texts that we have today, this Christ the King Sunday, this Sunday before Advent. We have these texts now, because we *need* hope.

In Luke 23, we find Jesus on the cross. The Perfect One, the One who was prophesied to save humankind, was hung between two criminals. He was hung and mocked, mocked even by the sign hung above his head: "This is the King of the Jews" (Lk 23:38b). He suffered the worst kind of death Rome could think of, between the worst of the criminals. His was the kind of death that was so shameful, that Rome later tried to erase all traces of this capital punishment. This was how he died, not the death of a beloved king, but the death of the *worst* kind of criminal.

It seemed that all hope was lost, that death and evil had the last word. His disciples had fled, women mourned for him, and the rest ridiculed him. He had claimed to be the Son of God, the One to forgive sins, the One all should follow, and the King of the Jews. He was loved by some, and hated by *many*.

He hung on the cross and awaited his death, but even on the cross, he didn't *simply* wait. Luke writes in verse 34 that Jesus prayed. He prayed as One who knew that this wasn't the end; he prayed as One who knew there was more. He prayed that God would forgive those who crucified and mocked him; he prayed that God would forgive their sins and the sins of *all people*. "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

One of the criminals joined in the mockery, but the other criminal knew that this man *must be* a king. "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom," he pleaded (Lk 23:42b).

It is amazing that a man who had so little time with Jesus could have such faith. It is amazing that a man who heard no claims from Jesus, never saw him perform a miracle, nor saw the faith of any other person, could believe that this man was a king. This man's only crown was a crown of thorns, and his clothes were divided among the soldiers; he was naked.

In this bleak moment, the criminal knew that this was *not* the end, that even in *this* moment, there was *hope*. And this criminal would not be disappointed. Jesus replied, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise" (Lk 23:43b).

In the bleakest moment in *history*, there was hope. It was not a hope that the crucifixion would be less painful, that Jesus and the criminal would be taken down

from the cross and somehow spared, or that everything would now finally be as it ought. The hope for this criminal was that there was something *beyond* this life, and that he would be with Jesus. The hope was that somehow, Jesus was *king*.

This is what is so unbelievable, that we too have hope, because of an event that seemed utterly *hopeless*. We have hope because Jesus did not come as other kings, who live to be served, but he came as one who *served*. He came as One who did not fulfill his own desires, but as One who was obedient to his Father, obedient even to death on the cross (Phil 2:8).

Because of Jesus' death, we join the criminal in hope. We hope for a life beyond this life, a life that is not based on how "naughty or nice" we've been, but a life based on what Jesus has done *for us* on the cross. It is a life that is beyond what we can comprehend.

Because of Jesus' death, God the Father raised him from the dead, and we have hope that he *will* one day come again. He will come on a day and time that no one will expect, but he *will come*. He will come to restore creation, to restore everything as it was intended to be. He will come to finally reign as king, a king whose dominion will never end.

*This* is our hope. *Jesus* is our hope. We do not hope in the powers of finance, our leaders, or in ourselves, but we hope in Jesus.

This is good news. Jesus Christ is king, and one day, he will rightly take his place, and reign on earth. What a day that will be!

In the meantime, we wait. And we wait with hope.

For some, that waiting is easier. You are the Supermen and Superwomen of patience. You've got the waiting thing down. Your faith is unshakeable, and you will wait and wait and wait until you no longer need to wait. What a wonderful gift!

For the rest of us, waiting is about the hardest thing we could be asked to do. We would rather work really hard and drive ourselves crazy, just so we don't need to wait. We look at our present circumstances and quickly despair. We can't see how something good could come from *this*. We look at our present circumstances, and forget God's provision for us in the past. We forget. We don't remember. As my husband likes to say, we have the memory of a goldfish, or of Dory from *Finding Nemo*, who forget three seconds later.

We wait and we hope in what is to come, but our hope is not *simply* in the future. We have a *present* hope, a hope that we are *never* alone, and that God is doing His restorative work *now*. We have the Holy Spirit, who was sent after Jesus' resurrection and ascension, to be with all who believe. The Holy Spirit is with us and will guide us in all truth. He will never leave us.

Yesterday, many of us gathered to celebrate the life of Vera Frase, a long-time member and beloved friend of many at St. Timothy's. We gathered to honor her memory and to be reminded of the hope we have in Jesus. We sang her favorite hymns and heard her favorite Scripture verses. One of the verses was one she had chosen as a young girl in Confirmation, one that continued to bring her hope. "For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our

Lord," Romans 8:38 – 39. Nothing in life and nothing in death will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

We have hope because of God's love for us in Christ Jesus. We have a future hope and a present hope because Jesus Christ became king.

S.M. Lockridge was the pastor of a prominent African-American congregation in San Diego, and was most famous for his sermon, "That's My King!" His description of Jesus Christ is perfect on this Christ the King Sunday.

"The Bible says my King is a seven-way king.  
 He's the King of the Jews; that's a racial king.  
 He's the King of Israel; that's a national King.  
 He's the King of Righteousness.  
 He's the King of the Ages.  
 He's the King of Heaven.  
 He's the King of Glory.  
 He's the King of Kings, and He's the Lord of Lords.

That's my King.

Well, I wonder, do you know Him? David said, "The Heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament shows His handiwork.

My King is a sovereign King.  
 No means of measure can define His limitless love.  
 No far-seeing telescope can bring into visibility the coastline of His shoreless supply.  
 No barrier can hinder Him from pouring out His blessings.

He's enduringly strong.  
 He's entirely sincere.  
 He's eternally steadfast.  
 He's immortally graceful.  
 He's imperially powerful.  
 He's impartially merciful.

Do you know Him?

He's the greatest phenomenon that ever crossed the horizon of this world.  
 He's God's Son.  
 He's a sinner's Savior.  
 He's the centerpiece of civilization.

He stands in the solitude of Himself.  
 He's awesome.  
 He's unique.  
 He's unparalleled.  
 He's unprecedented.

He's the loftiest idea in literature.  
 He's the highest personality in philosophy.  
 He's the supreme problem in higher criticism.  
 He's the fundamental doctrine of true theology.  
 He's the cardinal necessity of spiritual religion.  
 He's the miracle of the age.  
 He's the superlative of everything good that you choose to call Him.  
 He's the only one qualified to be an all-sufficient Savior.

I wonder if you know Him today?

He supplies strength for the weak.  
 He's available for the tempted and the tried.  
 He sympathizes and He saves.  
 He strengthens and sustains.  
 He guards and He guides.

He heals the sick.  
 He cleanses lepers.  
 He forgives sinners.  
 He discharges debtors.  
 He delivers captives.  
 He defends the feeble.  
 He blesses the young.  
 He serves the unfortunate.  
 He regards the aged.  
 He rewards the diligent.  
 And He beautifies the meek.

I wonder if you know Him?

Well, my King is the King.  
 He's the key to knowledge.  
 He's the wellspring to wisdom.  
 He's the doorway of deliverance.  
 He's the pathway of peace.  
 He's the roadway of righteousness.  
 He's the highway of holiness.  
 He's the gateway of glory.

Do you know Him?

Well.

His office is manifold.  
 His promise is sure.  
 His light is matchless.  
 His goodness is limitless.  
 His mercy is everlasting.  
 His love never changes.

His Word is enough.  
 His grace is sufficient.  
 His reign is righteous.  
 And His yoke is easy, and his burden is light.

I wish I could describe Him to you, but He's indescribable.

Well,

He's incomprehensible.  
 He's invincible.  
 He's irresistible.  
 You can't get Him out of your mind.  
 You can't get Him off of your hand.  
 You can't out-live Him,  
 And you can't live without Him.

The Pharisees couldn't stand Him, but they found out they couldn't stop Him.  
 Pilate couldn't find any fault in Him.  
 The witnesses couldn't get their testimonies to agree.  
 Herod couldn't kill Him.  
 Death couldn't handle Him,  
 And the grave couldn't hold Him.

Yea! That's my King, that's my King. Father, "Yours is the Kingdom and the Power and the Glory Forever" and ever, and ever, and ever, and ever. How long is that? And when you get through with all the forevers, then, AMEN and AMEN!"<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup><https://www.shadowmountain.org/Content/HtmlImages/Public/Documents/General/EBI/Thats%20My%20King%20-%20Do%20You%20Know%20Him.pdf>