



## **Gathering in the Word**

Today in the Christian Church around the world is the Reign of Christ also known as Christ the King Sunday! It's the last Sunday in Pentecost; and next Sunday begins Advent!

*Calvary (also known as Golgotha is outside the walls of Jerusalem where Jesus was crucified) is the center of sacred-space-time for all us*

Christians! Jesus always forgave the people right in front of him; yet the crowds and political leaders are dominated by fear and self-interest—they cannot see beyond their own alienation and their consequent need to dominate and destroy.

Jesus is the projection—the scapegoat—*meaning Jesus is the one made to take the blame*—the one intended to ease the crowds' and the political leaders' anxiety and alienation; but this projection of Jesus as the scapegoat does not limit or dominate Jesus. Jesus freely claims his relationship to GOD's Shalom (Peace) in the maelstrom of violence around him!

**Jesus' promise to his companion on the cross goes from *clock time* to *GOD's everlasting life*.** Jesus' words, "*Today you will be with me in Paradise,*" suggests a relationship of wholeness in the midst of death and dying. For all of us as

people of faith gathered here this morning, we can experience everlasting life **now**: we can experience GOD's vision amid the ordinary moments as well as the tragic times of our lives!

**Death does not limit GOD's love and aloha!  
Even Christians can't limit GOD's love and aloha!**

## Hearing the Word

### Jeremiah 23:1-6, 7-8 (The VOICE Bible)

23 **Eternal One:** Woe to the shepherds who slaughter and scatter the sheep of my pasture! <sup>2</sup> This is what I, the Eternal God of Israel, have to say about the shepherds tending my people:

You have scattered my flock, driven them far away, and failed *miserably* at being their caregivers. So look! I will punish you *for your negligence*, for the *careless* evil you've done. <sup>3</sup> I will personally gather the remnant of my sheep from the lands where I have driven them. I will bring them back to their home pasture where they will be fruitful and multiply. <sup>4</sup> I will appoint *new, responsible* shepherds to take care of them, and my sheep will no longer have to be afraid. *These new, responsible shepherds will make sure* that none of my sheep go missing.

<sup>5</sup> Watch! The days are coming when I will raise up a righteous Branch of David—*an heir of his royal line*—who will rule justly, act wisely and make things right again in

the land. <sup>6</sup> During His reign, Judah will be redeemed and Israel will be a safe place again. The name he is called *will tell the story*: The Eternal Is Our Righteousness!

<sup>7</sup> **So be ready and watch carefully. The days are coming when no one will say any longer, "As the Eternal lives, who brought the people of Israel out of slavery in the land of Egypt."** <sup>8</sup> **Instead, they will say, "As the Eternal lives, who brought the people of Israel out of exile in the lands of the north and out of all other countries where he had scattered them." Then the Israelites will live *securely* in their own land.**

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One of the most famous "*catch-phrases*" in the Hebrew Scriptures is the line ". . . *who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.*" This is about GOD's gracious act in bringing the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt to freedom. The Exodus continues to exercise a powerful pull on the church even today!

But in Jeremiah 23, **GOD predicts a day when a new king would rule over a new people!** What's more—**that new people would be drawn from every land into which those covenant people of GOD had scattered** as a result of GOD's punishing cataclysm and upheaval for the faithlessness of the people. But according to

Jeremiah, that **re-gathering** of GOD's scattered people would be so much greater than the original Exodus from Egypt that the day would come when people would no longer refer to GOD as the one "who brought you out of the land of Egypt" but instead would say that GOD was the one "who brought Israel up out of the lands to which they had been banished."

*Despite the people's 40-year hiccup of wilderness wanderings—the original Exodus ultimately resulted in a political kingdom of significant glory and wealth and splendor. However, before long, Israel would become an occupied territory again for centuries to follow.*

**Yet GOD reassures the people that really, honestly, no kidding—all of this would lead to a better day, a better King, a better Kingdom! GOD was going to build a new people and raise up a branch from the line of David to become a King-like-no-other! "The Lord of Righteousness" would come and would be great!**

While some say that this never came into being; Christians have a different view. We think it did happen and that the better King did come. **It's just that he came in diapers and ended up**

**being glorified on a cross!** Both the King and the Kingdom GOD established were of a different nature than what David and Solomon had once established.

**Salvation came, not just to Judah but to the whole world and if the way in which salvation came was surprising—so finally is the reach of salvation to all the peoples of the earth! For us today in our joint worship—this is the case that the way we celebrate the Reign of Christ—is the way GOD used the Holy Spirit of Pentecost to establish the Church and Kingdom that knows no boundaries or limits!**

The Kingdom of GOD—and the One who rules over the Kingdom as the King of Kings—really is the greatest thing ever!

- ✓ Jeremiah predicted it!
- ✓ We live it today, right now!

### **Luke 23:33-43 (The VOICE Bible)**

<sup>33</sup> When they came to the place known as “The Skull,” they crucified Jesus there, in the company of criminals, one to the right of Jesus and the other to His left.

**Jesus:** <sup>34</sup> [Father, forgive them, for they don’t know what they’re doing.]

Meanwhile they were drawing lots to see who would win Jesus' clothing. <sup>35</sup> The crowd of people stood, watching.

**Authorities** (*mocking Jesus*): So He was supposed to rescue others, was He? He was supposed to be God's Anointed, *the Liberating King*? Let's see Him start by liberating Himself!

<sup>36</sup> The soldiers joined in the mockery. First, they *pretended to offer Him a soothing drink*—but it was sour wine.

**Soldiers:** <sup>37</sup> Hey, if you're the King of the Jews, why don't you free yourself!

<sup>38</sup> Even the inscription they placed over Him was intended to mock Him—"This is the King of the Jews!" [This was written in Greek, Latin, and Hebrew.]

<sup>39</sup> One of the criminals joined in the cruel talk.

**Cynical Criminal:** You're supposed to be the Anointed One, right? *Well—do it!* Rescue yourself and us!

<sup>40</sup> But the other criminal told him to be quiet.

**Believing Criminal:** Don't you have any fear of God at all? You're getting the same death sentence He is! <sup>41</sup> We're getting what we deserve since we've committed crimes, but this man hasn't done anything wrong at all! <sup>42</sup> (turning to Jesus) Jesus, when you come into your kingdom, please remember me.

**Jesus:** <sup>43</sup> I promise you that this very day you will be with me in paradise.

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Jesus began his ministry with the devil in the wilderness challenging him 3 times and the way he tried to get under our Lord's skin as to say, "**If** you

are the Son of God, then . . .” Now as Jesus’ ministry comes to an end on the cross at Skull Hill, the devil uses some surrogates and others once *again to lob and throw this tiny word* in Jesus direction: “Jump down from there **if** you are the Son of God! “**If** you are the King of the Jews—then do something!”

Jesus in one sense did give in to the taunts and jeers on that cross—but in so doing—Jesus turned the taunts and jeers on their head. Being the Son of GOD meant suffering and dying. Coming down off that cross would have been a profoundly wrong thing for the Christ, the Son of GOD, the King of the Jews to do!

The first half of all those “**If**” clauses were onto something: the reality and identity of the Son of GOD was about to be revealed and proven! It was the second clause that had it wrong. But who could have seen that coming? Well—obviously—the devil did! The devil who was behind all those tongue-wagging deriders showing contempt at the cross knew full well that the actual formula of the day was “If you are the Son of GOD, prove it by staying where you are.”

This is what Jesus did, of course, and in so doing Jesus not only turned those taunts and jeers on

their head, Jesus turned the whole reality upside-down! And only by shaking things up just that much could Jesus save a world that had long ago convinced itself that up was down and black and white and might made right.

Luke 23 is where we go in the “Reign of Christ/Christ the King” Sunday. The cross is a strange place to go the week before we start our annual trek to Bethlehem and the start of Advent next Sunday—December 1<sup>st</sup>! But when you think about it—it’s an even stranger place to visit to celebrate the kingly reign of someone. As *Neal Plantinga*’ famously said in a sermon some years ago, getting “glorified on a cross” is finally as nonsensical as claiming to be “enthroned on an electric chair.” Such an odd route to glory and power certainly was not one the minds of all the mockers and scornful persons who began so many sentences with “**If . . .**” that day.

**But the odd route is GOD’s route! This route was no mistake! This route led to the glory of salvation.** And that’s why we commemorate Christ Jesus, the King of Kings!

## **Doing the Word**

So what is the Word of God for us on this Last Sunday in Pentecost—the Sunday before Advent—and Thanksgiving Sunday?

**1. One: SALVATION CAME FIRST TO THE JEWISH PEOPLE—BUT FOR US ON THIS REIGN OF CHRIST SUNDAY, WE CELEBRATE THE REIGN OF CHRIST—THE WAY THAT GOD USED THE HOLY SPIRIT AT PENTECOST TO ESTABLISH THE CHURCH AND THE KINGDOM THAT KNOWS NO BOUNDARIES OR LIMITS!**

- ✓ We the Church are to be a welcoming, friendly people!
- ✓ We are to welcome all ages, all colors, all languages and cultures!
- ✓ We are to be a forgiving community and hold no grudges!
- ✓ We are a **sign** and **foretaste** of GOD's Kingdom here in Honolulu!

**2. Two: THE CHURCH IS TO GROW AND BE THE KINGDOM OF GOD!**

- ✓ Churches don't plan to fail—Churches fail to plan!
- ✓ The Kingdom of GOD is over and over *that small thing that all-but-gets-lost in the hubbub of the wider world!*
- ✓ The Kingdom of GOD is the *pearl of great price* that someone just happens to stumble on in unlikely places!
- ✓ The Kingdom of GOD does not call attention to itself like a marching band coming down King Street with brass and drums blaring but is instead the yeast that disappears into the larger lump of dough; the tiniest of all seeds that vanishes almost the very moment it hits the dirt!

### **3. Three: The Kingdom of GOD begins and starts in the now and present!**

- ✓ The Kingdom is present wherever and whenever we pray the way Jesus taught us to pray!
- ✓ The Kingdom is present wherever Jesus nurtures certain behaviors and lifestyles that we call the Fruit of the Spirit!
- ✓ The Kingdom is present whenever people pour water over the heads of people being baptized or to take bread and wine to their lips simply because Jesus told us that this

is the way we are to act in remembrance of him!

- ✓ The Kingdom is present wherever a believer somewhere refuses to go along with some scheme or plot because she or he believes it is untruthful and that going along with it would make her/him less transparent to Jesus!
- ✓ Whenever and wherever a person refuses to participate in a binge-drinking party; whenever and wherever someone refuses to cut corners on his taxes; and whenever or wherever a kindly old woman brings light into a neighbor's darkness by speaking a word of peace and aloha; and whenever or wherever a woman sits down to tutor a homeless child; and whenever or wherever all such things are done because all these people believe there is a Lord named Jesus—then **there—right there and right here and right now—the Kingdom of GOD is present because the effective will of Jesus is calling the shots!**

## **Sent in the Word**

Jesus made things clear that the Kingdom of GOD is most concerned with the dispossessed,

*the evicted, expelled, ejected, cast out, and the homeless; the lost, the last, the least, and the subjugated, broken, oppressed, exploited!*

GOD's Kingdom is for those who know they're dead without it.

The Good News of the Gospel is that our hope need not be pinned only to a far-off, remote future time. Those-who-are-in-Christ have a security and a hope that is for right now and not just off on some misty distant shore!

Jesus' non-engagement with the thief-on-the-cross in Luke 23 may be yet another indication for us that for the Kingdom of GOD—**Jesus did not mean it in some eschatological (*end-of-the-world*) sense that that Kingdom would exist only by-and-by at the time of the Second Coming. The Kingdom of GOD is available now—albeit as a hidden reality in this world. Yes—it will fully come and flower and flourish in *eschaton* which is *the final event in the divine plan; the end of the world to come.***

**Jesus wanted people/Christians/the Church to live in Kingdom-ways in the *now and present time!***

**Jesus was on the Cross, asking GOD's forgiveness for those who were persecuting him—so too are we to forgive one another and our enemies!**

The Advent weeks ahead are no nostalgia trip to make us remember something that once was but is no more. Advent—like the rest of the Christian life and its Kingdom-focus—is about the here, the now, and also the forever after!

**“Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom.” Thanks be to GOD for GOD has remembered each one of us this morning and we are in GOD's Kingdom—now! Today!**

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<sup>i</sup> Neal Plantinga was president of Calvin Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, Michigan from 2002 through 2011.