

Streetsville United Church  
Sunday, November 24, 2019  
Rev. John Tapscott

## “A MOST UNUSUAL KING”

Luke 23:33-43

Queen Elizabeth of England, and our Queen too, is doing remarkably well, even at age 93. She has conducted herself with dignity throughout her long reign. She is admired throughout the world. She really does fit the role. Now Queen Elizabeth will have to give up the throne some day, though probably not until she dies. Prince Charles will then become King of England and the Commonwealth. But it's harder to see Charles as King. He doesn't seem to fit the role somehow, though he's been groomed for it all his life. He may seem like a rather unusual king, but he will probably do fine. Thankfully, Prince Andrew will never get anywhere near the throne.

This last Sunday in the Church year is known as Christ the King or the Reign of Christ. But what an unusual king Jesus is. Who could imagine a King on a cross? Such a strange figure - innocent yet labelled a criminal by the political and religious authorities and crucified between two real criminals. Who could call this one royalty?

When Pilate sentenced Jesus to death he had an inscription nailed to Jesus' cross saying, "This is the King of the Jews." (Luke 23:38) Now Pilate was mocking both Jesus and the Jews with this sign. "Israel – here is your King, and what a sad King he is, crucified and wearing a crown of thorns on his bloodied head!" Pilate was right. "Jesus is King of the Jews." Even more, this Jesus is King of all people. God crowned him as Lord and King when he raised him from the dead and vindicated all he said and did. Daniel was given a vision of Jesus' Kingship. "I saw one like a Son of Man coming with the clouds of heaven. And he came to the Ancient One and was presented before him. To him was given dominion and glory and kingship, that all peoples, nations and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, and his kingship is one that shall never be destroyed." Yes, Jesus may be an unusual king but he is God's appointed King. He is King of all. He is King forever. What kind of King is he?

*First, Jesus is the suffering King.*

Crucifixion was a terrible form of capital punishment. The pain of nails through hands and feet, the exposure of a person's naked body to the elements and to vultures, plus the increasing struggle to even take a breath – it was horrendous. Some people spent days on the cross before their heart finally gave out. Some went mad. King Jesus lost so much blood from his scourging that he died after six hours on the cross. But no matter how long it was, the suffering was unbearable. Crucifixion was so cruel that the Romans eventually stopped using it.

Now the physical suffering Jesus endured on the cross was bad enough. But his spiritual suffering was even worse. We will never understand how deep were the waters he passed through. The real abandonment he suffered was dark indeed, as the Father turned away and let his beloved Son die alone. What anguish there is in those haunting words, "My God, my God why have you forsaken me?" Unlike the criminals on either side of him Jesus didn't die for his own sins and wrongdoing. He had done nothing wrong. No, he died for our sin and wrongdoing. Peter writes, "He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed." The suffering that King Jesus endured on the cross for our sake, is beyond comprehension.

Sometimes people turn away from God and faith because of their own suffering or more often, because of the suffering of the world. "How could a loving God allow it?" they ask. There is no easy answer but we can say that God does not turn away from the world's suffering. In fact, in the person of his Son God personally endured the worst the world could offer. Jesus even refused the wine which would have dulled the pain a bit. King Jesus shows us that we have a God who suffers with us and for us. And through his resurrection victory this King points beyond suffering to a Kingdom where there is no more crying or mourning or pain or hunger or death, for the former things have passed away. Even the worst suffering here on earth is temporary, but God's Kingdom is eternal. We never belittle suffering, and we do our best to relieve it, and to resist the evil which causes so much of it. But because King Jesus suffered and won the victory, suffering will not and cannot be the final word.

The story is told that Queen Victoria went to visit a grieving woman who had lost her husband. As the Queen entered the room, the woman began to stand up and bow before the Queen. But Victoria said, "No, no, sit down, I come to you, not as a Queen, but as one person who has suffered loss to another."

Just so King Jesus draws near to those who suffer, as one sufferer to another. He comes as a source of comfort and strength. In his wounds we find healing and hope. I have told you the story before of the young Christian woman who was paralyzed in a diving accident. She fell into a dark place of bitterness and despair and doubt. One day, a friend tried to comfort her and said, as a last resort, "Joanie, remember that on the cross, Jesus was paralyzed too." And in those words, the living Lord Jesus came to her with light and hope. And though Joanie was still confined to a wheelchair, she went on to develop a strong Christian ministry of writing, speaking and personal witness. Jesus is the suffering king.

*Secondly, Jesus is the selfless king.*

Now I could say that he was the servant king, for that is true. He said of himself, "The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve." But I use the adjective selfless because this king was truly selfless in his service.

I saw a headline this week. "Hollywood actress claims having a baby has cut into her self-care time." Well, having a baby will do that. And while we all need a bit of self-care time, it's hard to

imagine Jesus complaining that he didn't have enough time for self-care. His focus was always on selflessly serving others.

Perhaps the most remarkable thing about Jesus' Kingship is right here. As he was being nailed to the cross Jesus was not crying out about the injustice of it all. He wasn't demanding his rights. Even as he died, his thoughts transcended the pain and focussed on the needs of others, the very ones hammering rusty nails into his hands and feet. These have to be the most selfless words ever uttered, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

But those words were really uttered for us all. Sin, whether deliberate or even unwitting, is serious business. We never know the full extent of the consequences. It is like the thread on a garment. Once you start to pull on the thread it just doesn't want to stop until the whole thing is unravelled. There really is no such thing as a little sin, for any sin breaks our relationship with God and with others. Sin ruins trust and causes pain. It leads to death and eternal loss. All the sins that put Jesus on the cross are the everyday sins that are in us too – self-interest, lies, greed, envy. Nothing unusual about them at all.

"Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing." Did the Father answer his son's prayer? Yes, because according to his eternal plan, his Son was dying in our place. And when the Father raised him from the dead, it meant that Jesus' death had been accepted as the full and final sacrifice for the sins of the world. Sufficient forgiveness was poured out for everyone, for every sin. And Christ is still praying for us in heaven, making intercession, asking the Father to forgive us on the basis of the sacrifice he made.

Someone asked the famous preacher Peter Marshall whether he really thought we shall have to stand before God on judgement day and hear the roll call of our sins. He said, "Yes, the Bible makes it quite clear. Some day, somewhere, somehow, there will be an accounting before God for each of us." Then Peter Marshall added, "But I believe it will be like this – Jesus will come over and lay his hand across my shoulders and say to God, "Yes, all these things are true, but I'm here to cover up for Peter. He is sorry for all his sins, and by a transaction made between us, I am now solely responsible for them."

Have you turned to Christ put your trust in him? If so, then you are cleansed of all sin by his blood. You can be absolutely sure that you are a forgiven child of God, an heir of eternal life. And the power of God's forgiveness enables you to forgive others. You begin to forgive as you have been forgiven. Restored relationships and peace are the signs of Kingdom where Christ reigns. As subjects of the selfless King we grow in selflessness. Our thoughts which naturally turn inward, begin to turn outward. We are not consumed with our own rights, but with seeking the good of others. Jesus Christ is the selfless king who is making selfless followers.

*Finally, Jesus is the saving king.*

Jesus was derided by the bystanders. "If you are the King of the Jews save yourself...save yourself and us." But if he had saved himself, he couldn't have saved us. The Cross was the very instrument of salvation.

Notice the King's interaction with the thieves crucified on either side of him. One of the thieves kept deriding him and saying, "Aren't you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!" But the other criminal said, "Don't you fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? We are getting what we deserve for our deeds. But this man has done nothing wrong." This man was a criminal, but he had spiritual insight. He rightly judged himself as guilty, and Jesus as innocent. Somehow he believed that Jesus could save him. "Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom." Jesus did that and more. Then and there Jesus saved him from condemnation and promised to bring him into heaven. "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise." We're not told what happened to the thief who derided Jesus. But we can presume that he entered eternity unsaved.

No, Jesus didn't save himself, though he could have. Instead, he entrusted himself fully to his God and Father who can raise the dead. And so the Father did, on the third day. Now the Risen King saves everyone of us who responds to him with even a mustard seed of faith. There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus the King.

Yes, Jesus is a most unusual King. He is the suffering King, the selfless King, the saving King. By God's appointing he is King of all. He is King of creation. Enthroned in your heart. Name him as your King. Live as his faithful subject and don't be afraid. This King has your back. He won't let you go. One day he shall call your name and say, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise."