

Sermon

“First Place in Everything”

A Sermon for First Presbyterian Church

Sunday, November 24, 2019

Christ the King Sunday

Luke 23:33 When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. 34 [Then Jesus said, “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.”] And they cast lots to divide his clothing. 35 And the people stood by, watching; but the leaders scoffed at him, saying, “He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!” 36 The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine, 37 and saying, “If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!” 38 There was also an inscription over him, “This is the King of the Jews.”

Luke 23:39 One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, “Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!” 40 But the other rebuked him, saying, “Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? 41 And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong.” 42 Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” 43 He replied, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.”

Col. 1:11 May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully 12 giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light. 13 He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Col. 1:15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all

creation; 16 for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. 17 He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. 18 He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. 19 For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, 20 and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.

I. City Slickers —

- A. Middle-aged man in crisis because he is unfulfilled at work and wondering about the meaning of it all.**
- B. Talked into going on a round-up to escort cattle from one state to another on horseback.**
- C. Curley is the tough-as-hickory *real* cowboy sent along to be sure things don't go too far astray.**

Billy Crystal -

Jack Palance as Curly

C: There's nothing like bringing in a herd.

BC: That's great! Your life makes sense to you. (Curly laughs) What's so funny?

C: You city folk . . . you worry about a lot of {unnecessary things} ...

BC: {unnecessary}? My wife basically told me she doesn't want me around.

C: How old are you?....38?

BC: 39

C: Yeah . . . you all come out here about the same age with the same problems. You spend 50 weeks a year getting knots in your ropes and then you think two weeks out here will untie them for ya . . . none of you get it.

You know what the secret of life is?

BC: No - what?

C: [holding one finger up] This.

BC: Your finger?

C: One thing. Just *one thing*. You stick to that and everything else [will fall into place]

BC: That's great . . . but . . . what's the one thing?

C: *That's what you gotta figure out.*

I don't normally preach the gospel according to City Slickers . . . but I think Curly is on to something.

II. What is our "one thing?"

A. All Summer the gospel according to Luke has been exhorting us to see that faith demands that we make a choice.

1. I suspect that much of our angst in faith derives from our resistance to making that choice.

a. We want to serve two or more masters

church.

- IV. What might we look like to the world if we acknowledged Jesus as “first place” in everything?**
- A. I imagine that many of our petty theological arguments would fade away.**
 - B. I imagine that we would begin to really see one another and others we meet in the course of our daily walk.**
 - 1. Not casually see them**
 - 2. Not overlook them because their circumstance might impinge on our freedoms**
 - 3. Not look past them and pretend they and their problems do not belong to us...**
 - 4. I am already thinking about sermons for next year and, as I mentioned last week, in Epiphany we have the astonishing text from Isaiah 58. I will say much more about it, of course, then . . . but I read these words at the start of our Session meeting last week because they have been persistently on my heart of late.**

They are about putting God and God’s intentions as “first place” in our lives:

*Is. 58:6 Is not this the fast that I choose:
to loose the bonds of injustice,
to undo the thongs of the yoke,
to let the oppressed go free,
and to break every yoke?*

- 7 *Is it not to share your bread with the hungry,
and bring the homeless poor into your house;
when you see the naked, to cover them,
and not to hide yourself from your own kin?*
- 8 *Then your light shall break forth like the dawn,
and your healing shall spring up quickly;
your vindicator shall go before you,
the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard.*
- 9 *Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer;
you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am.*

V. Perhaps this morning you wondered why on earth Luke 23 was the Gospel reading on Christ the King Sunday

- A. It seems an odd selection to have Jesus in the midst of crucifixion as the gospel-reading on the day we intend to lift him up as King of all kings.**
- B. Hanging there between two criminals**
- C. With soldiers gambling for his meager possessions at the foot of his cross.**
- D. The wounds of flogging open on his back**
- E. The crown of thorns on his head in a symbol of mockery...he does not look the part of “king.”**

VI. And into this moment of shame and painful cruelty someone comes to realize that the one beside him is worthy of being first place.

Luke 23:39 One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, “Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!” 40 But the other rebuked him, saying, “Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? 41 And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong.” 42 Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” 43 He replied, “Truly I tell you,

today you will be with me in Paradise.”

A. What strikes me about this moment is how easy it is.

- 1. No begging**
- 2. No whining**
- 3. No negotiating**
- 4. Just a simple petition from someone who finally understands the truth of their life ...**

we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong.” 42 Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”

B. Perhaps you and I would like to imagine that in some fundamental way we are different from this inmate who hangs beside Jesus and asks for mercy

- 1. But we are not.**
- 2. We, too, are sinners of Jesus own redeeming**
- 3. We do not belong among the community of the righteous — that’s why the liturgy is so full of moments where we rehabilitate sinners and welcome them again into the company of the saints.**
 - a. Baptism**
 - b. Invitation to the Table**
 - c. Confession and Absolution of Sin**

C. There is no question about God’s love for us - we experience it every time we meet in worship.

D. The question is *do we love God — Love God enough to:*

- † **Make God our first priority?**
- † **Learn to expect everything worth having by grace?**
- † **Joyfully and gladly accept the Governance of Christ the King in our lives and in our church for the world?**

VII. Next Lord's Day we begin again to wonder about our hope for redemption in the birth of the Christ-child.

- A. It is not too late for us to hail him "King of kings and Lord of Lords."**
 - 1. If a thief minutes away from death is not lost**
 - 2. There is hope for us yet.**
- B. So let us put Christ in First place today and always.**