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Church of the Holy Spirit
November 23, 2025
Luke 23:33-43

A regular participant in the CHS Bible Study, which meets on Tuesday morning at the Spinning Wheel at 7 am, asked me earlier this week, "Why are we reading about the crucifixion this week?" This is an excellent question, and I bet some others are wondering the same thing.

The short answer is it's because today is the Feast of Christ the King. This passage from Luke's Gospel, in which Jesus is named "king" by the Romans, makes literary sense to read today.

The full answer is more complicated- like much of the tradition in the Episcopal church, there are layers. Today is the last Sunday in liturgical year C. Next week, we begin the first Sunday of Advent in liturgical year A.

In case you weren't aware, there is a 3-year cycle of collects, lessons, psalms/ canticles, and gospel readings called the revised common lectionary to which the Episcopal Church subscribes, as well as many other mainline denominations- the Roman Catholics, ELCA Lutherans, Moravians, Methodists, and Presbyterians, to name a few. If you walked into any of their congregations today, they would, for the most part, be reading the same readings we just heard.

The lectionary cycle follows the liturgical calendar, which is meant to provide a 'retelling' of the life of Jesus as found in the Gospels, surrounded by thematic or other supporting scriptures related to the Gospel message. In year A, we read from the Gospel of Matthew; in year B, from the Gospel of Mark; in year C, it's Luke, and occasionally, as the season allows or indicates, we have readings from the Gnostic Gospel of John.

The lectionary rota does not cover the entirety of scripture, but does give a general overview of the life and times of Jesus, as well as his ancestry and his disciples' works after the resurrection.

The lectionary is one aspect of our regularly scheduled worship in the church. Still, we also have a calendar, called the liturgical calendar, which is not the same as the Julian, or Gregorian calendar, nor is it based on the Hebrew calendar. However, we do borrow some terms from Jesus' own Jewish religious tradition- like Pentecost which means 50 days after Passover for the Jews, and Easter for Christians. The Lectionary calendar is a unique accounting of time. I am not sure if it is intentionally designed to be out of sync with the world around The Church, which it clearly is but it certainly leads to an intricate spiderweb of calendar keeping in a two parish, double clergy household, with two children in different schools- let me tell you.

The oddity of the Liturgical calendar originates because it is not based upon measurable or natural events such as the phases of the moon, tides, weather patterns, or growing seasons. Instead, the liturgical (of the calendar of the work of the people, which is what the word liturgy means in Greek) is centered around the life and teachings of Jesus. In general, the year reflects Jesus' 33 (ish) years of life condensed into 365 days.

Beginning with Advent, the season of preparation and expectation, we have Mary's consent and subsequent pregnancy. The season of incarnation is Christmas, 12 days, when Jesus is born, presented to the Temple, and baptized by John. Epiphany lasts from January 6th to Ash Wednesday, which is determined based on the lunar cycle and aligns with the Hebrew calendar, because Ash Wednesday always falls 40 days before Passover, which is the weekend of Holy Week in the Western Christian church.

It is when, by the light of the star, the Mages presented gifts fit for a king, and we have a season of growing in wisdom and faith that parallels Jesus' growing up and being enlightened to his divinity.

Lent is the season of repentance, turning again towards God, and reconciling oneself to God's intention for each of us. This is when Jesus also turns to Jerusalem, all the while preaching and teaching and gaining followers.

Holy Week is the last week of Jesus' life. We observe the Triduum: the Last Supper, the mandate to love and serve one another, the arrest, trial, conviction, and execution of Jesus on Friday, and Easter, when the promise of resurrection is affirmed. We live in the season of resurrection for 50 days, celebrating and learning from, encountering the risen Christ in unexpected and exciting ways, until he ascends into heaven (40 days into the Easter Season).

The last season of the year is the season after Pentecost, which is when Christ sent the Holy Spirit to be our only mediator and advocate, with God the Father, and Christ the Son, who was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be. This season after Pentecost is the one that ends today with the feast of Christ the King.

Why does the year end with Christ being claimed as king? Jesus himself, not in this Gospel or any of the other scriptural accounts, never claims to be the king of the Jews. Every time Jesus and kingship are linked, it is by someone else's interpretation of who Jesus is. His life is bookended by the Magi who travel from the east to find the child destined to be the king of David’s royal line and those criminals are crucified on his right and left and asked to be invited into his eternal kingdom. The title 'king' is repeatedly attributed to Jesus, but it is not claimed by him.

Jesus does call himself the Son of God and talks about God's kingdom, which is not of this world. This is the loophole that those who wanted Jesus out of the picture, the Jewish authorities, and the Roman rulers used to collude and press charges against Jesus for heresy and treason. The claim to be equal to or higher than the emperor is the root cause of this crucifixion. While there were many gods in the Roman pantheon, there was only one god-made-man, and that was Caesar. Jesus defies this understanding by saying that he is the Son of God- he made himself equal to the emperor, which was a death sentence.

But what we know and celebrate today is not Jesus' treason, or remembering his death as a result of being called the "king of the jews." Instead, in observing the feast of Christ the King, we recognize, acknowledge, and accept that the promise that Jesus made to the man being executed beside him is the same promise that is offered to all of us.

That invitation is to join a kingdom nothing like anything that is known, experienced, or imagined in this world.

English is incredibly frustrating on days like today because there isn't a word that can approach the membership in God's care. Perhaps it's cultural, as someone who has grown up in the United States of America, and innately antimonarchical. Equally likely because my first degree is in Political Science, and I know the risks and tendencies of monarchies to become violent, corrupt, and otherwise unsustainable in the long term, I don't particularly care to think about Jesus as a king in the traditional sense, in addition to what he himself said and how he acted. But over the years of ministry I have found myself drawn more and more to the term kin-dom, K-I-N- D-O-M, that Dr. Ada Maria Isasi-Díaz used, noted professor of Hispanic Theology from Drew University, who described the kind of community that God desires for all humanity, an inclusive, expansive, and broad community that is not

based on geography, culture, or any other perceived or real division between peoples.

Kin-dom is a term now broadly used by liberation theologians and in mujerista (womanist) interpretations of scripture, which expands that invitation given by Jesus to a familial relationship all baptized people become adopted siblings of Christ. That there are all part of, and are necessary for the reign of God to become complete.

So it is today we remember Jesus, not as the King of the Jews, but as a different kind of leader, divine and human, eternal and mortal, subject and monarch, the Christ-King. We as baptized folks belong to the family of God, we are the kin of Christ, we are no longer servants but friends, no longer friends but siblings and in paradise the one who stands and the one whom re recognize as a king- unlike any king, prince, queen, princess, or any other monarch who has ever lived, or ruled over a kingdom of this earth. We plead like the criminal who died alongside Jesus that day.

In the words of a slightly adapted -Taize Chant- Originally- Jesus remember me when you come into your kingdom,

Today I pray-

Jesus, remember us when you come into your kin-dom

Amen