

## **Sermon for November 20, 2022—“The Cross of Christ the King”**

Christ the King Sunday, Year C—Texts: Colossians 1:11-20; Luke 23:33-43

Today’s Scripture readings speak of coronations, particularly the gospel reading.

We were reminded, in all the coverage surrounding her death back in September, that when Queen Elizabeth was crowned Queen of England on June 2, 1953, it was one of the first transcontinental events shown on television, so you could see it pretty much everywhere.

If you’ve never seen any of the clips of that, you really should, because her coronation was an incredible, incredible event, and because we don’t get to see too many coronations. They happen so rarely these days—though we’ll get to see Charles and Camilla crowned on May 6 of next year. I watched a clip of it earlier this week, and it was really something to see.

It was a religious ceremony, with the Archbishop of Canterbury, anointing her with sacred oil, placing lavish robes upon the twenty-five year old Elizabeth’s shoulders, rods and scepters in her hands. Finally, the crown, made for her father, weighing about two-and-a-half pounds, and worth today between \$3-6 *billion* dollars, was placed upon her head.

In the process of doing all this, I came across an old story that takes place in the Middle Ages. The story tells of two men who were watching the king get out of his golden carriage to go in to the church for some service. The first man, angry because royalty was often cruel, says to his friend, “I hope I live to see the day when royalty are treated as common people.” His friend turns to him and says, “I hope I live to see the day when common people are treated like royalty.”

Jesus represents the latter sentiment, because, to God, there’s no such thing as being treated like royalty unless you treat everyone like royalty. The coronation that we read about in the passion narratives in all four gospels is, of course, that of Jesus. All the elements are there. The soldiers after they get done scourging him and beating him, they sit him down and they find a crown of thorns for him and they kneel before him.

They put a purple cloak around him, because it’s the sign of royalty. They put a scepter, a reed, in his hand, because he is the King of the Jews. They even have a sign written by Pilate himself saying, “Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews,” and then they prepare his throne and he has to carry it up a hill.

When he gets there, his throne is laid out before him and they nail him to it and they put him up and they all start jeering and making fun of him. Not the way people ordinarily treat kings, but then, this is no ordinary king. This is **THE King**. Christ the King.

In preparation for today’s sermon, as I was thinking about the cross, which our gospel reading compels us to do, I came across an article about Jewish philosopher Simone Weil, who died very young at the end of the Second World War. She was Jewish, and though she never converted to Christianity, as some believe, she loved Christ with all her heart.

One of the priests watched her as she was looking at a crucifix in a church and he said, “Simone, what do you see when you look at the cross?” And she said, “I see God’s apology for all the pain.” What a wonderful understanding: “God’s apology for all the pain.”

Think about it...

He could not take away our pain without taking away our freedom, and He created us for freedom not for slavery. And while He couldn't take it away our pain, He could do only one thing and that was to share it. That is why His Son was born, taking on human flesh, becoming vulnerable and, in the end, suffering perhaps as no man has ever suffered.

What happens when we look at the cross, or even a crucifix? What do we see? Do we say, "How could God allow this to happen?" How could He look down and watch His Son destroyed, abandoned, hated, people out of their minds and going out of their way to show that not only are they going to destroy him by killing him, but they were going to scorn him, despise him. I mean, come on, even his disciples lost their minds. One betrayed him. One denied him. All but one ran away. Do we then ask ourselves "Why?"

Of course, we all know the answer to that question. It's because "...God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life." But why the cross? Why the great pain?

I remember overhearing people as they were coming out of the movie theater after seeing "The Passion of the Christ," besides the sounds of grown men and women sobbing, I heard things like: Why did he have to be scourged like that? Why had it to be so painful? Why did He have to die that way?

Simone Weil, she says, "Because on the high hill of Calvary, nobody from the beginning of time to the end of time can say anything; but, looking into the eyes of the crucified Messiah, we would say, 'He understands.'"

Something else I ran across this week which offers another way of looking at the crucified Savior. It's a book by Graham Greene which is called "Monsignor Quixote." I was actually made into a movie with Alec Guinness back in the late 1980's.

It was about a Monsignor, a very nice, sweet little simple priest who, by some mistake, was made a Monsignor. So, he and his friend, who was the local communist in this village, went off for an adventure to buy clothes for him, and they had to go to another part of Spain in order to buy them. And so the story is all about their adventures together. Now the simple priest and the communist mayor disagreed on just about everything, but they loved each other and they were great friends.

Anyway, one night, the poor Monsignor woke up in a cold sweat, terrified, not knowing what to do. His friend woke up and he ran over to him and he held him in his arms and he says, "What's wrong? What's wrong?" He said, "I had this terrible dream. It was just an awful dream. I never had a dream like this in my whole life and thank you for being here." His friend said, "Well, tell me about it. Maybe it will help if you talk about it."

"There I was," said the Monsignor. "I was at the foot of the cross and everybody was screaming and everybody was yelling, 'Come down from the cross, come down from the cross!' And all of a sudden, an angel appeared with a whole group of angels and they took Jesus and they lifted him up from the cross in great triumph and all the angels came and sang beautiful hymns. And everyone said, 'Yes, we were wrong. He is the Messiah, the Son of God.'" His friend said to him, "I don't see anything wrong with this dream. It sounds like a great dream."

But the Monsignor shook his head and said, “It’s the end of faith. No faith is necessary. And if no faith is necessary, there’s little to hope for. And if there’s little to hope for, why bother with love?”

Brothers and sisters, do we understand? I hope so, because here’s the thing: It’s out of the crucifixion that we learn how to love. It’s out of the unimaginable pain of the cross and the immeasurable generosity of God that we learn how important Jesus is, and how important and loved we are.

You know, that the cross became the symbol of Christianity is actually rather ironic. Back then, it was a sign of Roman cruelty and oppression. It was a sign of degradation. The Bible itself says, first in Deuteronomy, then in repeated by Paul in Galatians, “Cursed be the man who hangs upon a tree.

The cross has become Christ the King’s throne. The cross has become for us the greatest symbol of self-sacrificing love, and it is with self-sacrificing love that God changed the world. On that cross God sacrificed His Son and Jesus sacrificed himself for us; and when we pick up our own crosses, and have self-sacrificing love for each other, the world is changed—made new. All things are made new. We are made new.

Thanks be to God and Christ Our King.

Amen and amen.