



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

www.mzluth.org

November 20, 2022

Pastor Randy Ott

4th Sunday of End Time; Christ the King

First Lesson: [Genesis 49:8-12](#)

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 98

Second Lesson: [Colossians 1:13-20](#)

Gospel Lesson/Sermon Text: [Luke 23:35-43](#)

You Will Be With Me in Paradise

Welcome to worship today at Morrison Zion Lutheran Church. We exist to glorify God. We have set out to do this by gathering around the Gospel so that we may grow in the Gospel and go to others with this Gospel.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from Him who is, who was and who is to come: Amen.

In Christ, dear fellow redeemed:

It's kind of a strange Gospel for Christ the King Sunday. If you happened to be at the Passover for the first time in Jerusalem and you were walking outside the gates of the city where they were crucifying these three people, do you think you would look up in the middle and say to yourself, "Yep, there's the King"? He didn't look real kingly. In fact, He looked completely defeated, overcome and overpowered. You'd almost expect the Gospel for Christ the King Sunday to be something like Palm Sunday when all the people were all excited and pumped up and were welcoming Him as a King. I looked at it and I thought to myself, *maybe I should check. Maybe the slide person put the wrong text in there or something like that.* Then I remembered I send the bulletin to her so that couldn't have been it.

When you remember that our King is unlike any other king that has ever walked the face of this earth, and you remember that He has a different purpose than any other king that has walked the face of this earth, it all starts to make sense. We have a King that is unlike any other. He defeats our greatest enemy for us, in our place, by living perfectly in our place and then allowing Himself to be put to death on a cross to pay for our sins. What appears to be His weakest moment is His greatest triumph for us. So when our King says something that would seem to be completely and utterly ridiculous if you were standing by the cross that day: ***"Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise"***—it didn't look like paradise. It didn't sound like paradise as the nails were being pounded into His hands. He didn't look like a King. Yet you and I, because the Spirit has given us the gift of faith, trust this promise and we rely on it as we go through life. That's what we want to look at and focus on today.

In so much of this reading the word “king” is used as something to make fun of or mock. Kind of how like you guys talk to me about the Lions. You just do it to make fun and mock at the team I like. Well here are all these people outside Jerusalem just making fun of and mocking Jesus. “Yeah, he had done a lot of incredible things. He had saved others. But look at him now! He can’t save himself. He is no king. You guys that thought he was the coming Messiah, the one who is going to take the scepter of Judah and rule the nations, that ain’t going happen! Look at him! He can’t even save himself. How is he going to save us from the Romans?” In reality, that’s what a lot of the people there were looking for in a conquering Messiah. They were looking for someone who would literally take a ruling scepter and rule on this earth and get rid of the Romans and bring back the glory of David, the glory of Solomon, where they were that world power and they didn’t have to be subjects of anyone else. That’s what they were looking for. That’s what they wanted. It didn’t matter what the Old Testament had said because they just focused on the places in the Psalms where it talked about “Shout for joy to the Lord, the King!” ([Psalm 98:6](#)) They didn’t really pay attention to the Suffering Servant of Isaiah or [Psalm 22](#) where it talks about exactly what was going on in what I read to you in the Gospel. They had mistaken ideas so the leaders of the Jews mock Him.

Early in the day both criminals were mocking Him. It makes you wonder what changed for the one criminal, doesn’t it? He had also been mocking Jesus earlier in the day (Matthew and Mark tell us). So now here he is, when the other guy is mocking Jesus again he says, “Don’t you know we’re under the same sentence? We are getting what our deeds deserve. But He has done nothing wrong. Don’t you fear God, since you are under the same sentence?” It’s like He is calling Jesus “God.”

How could you look at a guy being crucified next to you and come to the conclusion He is God? Was it just the pain? Was it delirium? Was it he was just losing his senses? Humanly speaking, people might have thought so, but there are some truths that cannot be humanly understood. There are some truths that are only understood through the work of the Holy Spirit in people’s hearts. And as this man saw Jesus and maybe heard the interactions between Jesus and others on the cross (we heard some of them; I would think there were probably more that aren’t recorded for us), this man was led by the Holy Spirit to believe that Jesus was the promised Son of God who had come to earth to conquer his greatest enemy, which was the devil and death. How much of it all he understood? I don’t know. But he understood that Jesus was the key to entering paradise. ***“Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”*** What an odd phrase to say to someone whose back is raw hamburger from being whipped, whose face is covered with streaks of blood coming down from a crown of thorns. What a strange thing to say, but those are the words of faith—Spirit-given faith.

If you were one of those people walking around in Jerusalem for the first time and saw the guys you would have looked up to as the high religious muckety-mucks of the day,

the teachers of the Law, you would see the reason they didn't see Jesus as the promised Messiah was because the Spirit didn't live in their hearts. They had rejected His promises in the Old Testament. Jesus had said, "***These are the very Scriptures that testify about me...***" ([John 5:39](#)) but they didn't listen. They didn't want a King that delivers them from Satan. They wanted a king that delivers them from the Romans. Their eyes were set too low. Their expectations were too low. And they missed the greatest thing in the history of the world that was right in front of them.

Boy, they were fools, huh? It's not like we ever do that, is it? It's not like we ever miss the fact that God is still our King and is still ruling and is still watching over all things for the benefit of the church, like our Second Lesson said, and we miss it. We never do that, do we?

Do you ever set your expectations of God too low? Do you ever think God should be ruling as the King of the universe simply to make your life better? *God, weren't you paying attention? Why did you let the doctor say that it's cancer? Aren't you going to rule over all things for my good, God? God, my marriage is falling apart! Why are you worried about sharing the Gospel some place in the Ukraine when this is going on in my life?* Do we ever do that?

These are matters of faith. You can't always see how God is ruling in your life or my life or anyone's life but it's faith that believes that He is. So what keeps us from being focused on that more fervently, more directly and cling to it as though it's the only thing that matters in the world (because quite often that's the truth)? Do you think maybe it's because we don't pay attention to the Word? We don't talk about the Word as often as we could?

Oh I had a fascinating visit with a friend out in South Dakota recently. I ran into him and stopped and talked. We talked for quite a while, which was great because it got me out of moving concrete around for a little while, that was nice. One of the things we talked about was how this person quit going to church. He said "We'd just go to church and when we'd go home, we never talked about God outside of worship." It was like God belonged in THAT period and that was it. He said "We never talked about God. I've been asking other people, and that has been their experience too." He went through some tough stuff and he is now active in a church again and I'm happy for that but I wonder, do we hurt ourselves by thinking talking about God is just someone else's responsibility? We can talk about a lot of stuff that just isn't that important. We can talk about football. We can talk about weather. We can talk about how cold it is. I can go on for hours about how much I hate snow. If you want me to, I can do that easily. My wife will tell you that. She gets tired of it and tells me to knock it off. We can talk about a lot of stuff. But when others are going through tough times, do we just point them to a cat poster, or do we talk about God's promises in Christ?

We HAVE the power of the Gospel that God has entrusted to us and He has said to each and every one of us, "[You are my witnesses](#)." We can share that when people are hurting, when people are troubled, when people are worried. We can point them to God's promises—to this incredible truth that ***"I am with you always, to the very end of the age."*** ([Matthew 28:20](#)) ***"Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow..."*** ([Isaiah 1:18](#)) ***"Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."*** ([Hebrews 13:5](#)) You've got some of these passages written on your hearts. You can share them with each other. Then the Spirit works through that to build us up.

Who are your friends going to listen to more, you or a guy in a black dress? I'm supposed to say these things. I've had people say "You say that because you want more money in the offering." This is the jaded ear they have when I say it to them. When you say it to them they are going to listen. They might not act on it right away but I'll tell you, when you plant those seeds, those seeds are going to be planted a little deeper than if it's me telling them.

God has called you to this. You are His witnesses. You can speak the words of His promise and build one another up, comfort one another, encourage one another. This is what God has called you to do. It's not just what you do when you're here in worship. It's what God has called us to do in our daily lives. I'm not telling you to go to some store right now that's really full and tackle people and say "Do you believe in Jesus?" That's not what we're talking about. We're talking about your friends that you know are hurting. You can share with them the promises God has given. It will be natural and it will be comfortable if we become more comfortable talking about God. How about this: you guys talk about God more and I'll talk about snow less. Is that a deal? It's the power of God for the salvation, and it's in your hands. Amen.

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. ([Philippians 4:7](#)) Amen.