**Luke 23:27-43 November 20, 2022 (Last Sunday of the Church Year)**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

 Our text for this morning comes from our Gospel lesson, Luke chapter 23 here re-reading these words. “And the people stood by, watching, but the rulers scoffed at him, saying, ‘He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One!’ The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine and saying ‘If you are the King of the Jews save yourself!’ There was also an inscription over him, ‘This is the King of the Jews.” This is our text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

 The end of the Church Year focuses on a theme of the End times. The end of our world. The end of our time here and the end of the separation between us and God. Revelation is a book that speaks of the end times, it’s probably the most popular. But there is a cataclysmic event in the death of Jesus Christ as well. The sky is black, the earth shakes, the dead rise, and even a pagan Centurion in the moment of Jesus death remarks, “Truly this was the Son of God.” Paul speaks of everyone knowing the truth about Jesus in his letter to the Church in Philippi in chapter 2, “At the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” Everyone will know the truth eventually. In a way you can think of it as the shroud or confusion of sin being erased and everyone finally seeing the truth. The truth that the Scriptures reveal. The truth that we come together to celebrate and be comforted by in our lives of sin and our time in this sinful world. The truth of what was inscribed on the cross of Jesus Christ even as he hung in agony to die. “This is the King of the Jews.” But that inscription was incomplete, because it was a message to those gathered of the only way that the governing authorities saw him. He was just a leader of the Jewish people, a King of a group of people whose leaders wanted him dead. The difference on the Last Day is that Christ will return and everyone will know without a shadow of a doubt that Jesus wasn’t just King of the Jews, but that Jesus is the King of All Creation, the King of Kings, the Ruler of All.

 Paul in our Epistle lesson from Colossians speaks of this wonderful truth, and the authority of Jesus. “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities – All things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.” There is no kingdom without the King. Everything falls apart in His absence. Jesus is the head of the Church, there is no Church without him. While we are all called to serve in many and various ways as the body, there is no life without the head. There is no direction, there are no decisions, and nothing is done. Jesus is the ultimate authority. All things flow through him, life is ordered and done through God’s intervention alone. God did not create us and abandon us, like a parent who is going off on vacation and leaves the refrigerator and pantry stocked so the kids will be alright while they are gone. God isn’t just a part of creation, in that it functions on its own and at times with his intervention. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. When we look at the End of the Church Year, which focuses on the end of all things, we can’t overlook Jesus’s authority, because it is the first thing all will know when He returns in glory. “For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of the cross.”

 This is the great revelation of the cross, this bloody spectacle, this brutal death was the work of the King of all Kings, and it was done to make peace through his blood. It was a killing done by others as much as a sacrifice. There was more going on that day than the soldiers, and the people, and the rulers realized. And when Jesus died, they saw just a glimpse of who Jesus really was in the signs and events that took place. It made me think of the children’s fairy tale Cinderella, a well known and beloved tale of a girl who lives a very hard life with her Stepmother and Stepsisters. She finally gets to go to the ball thanks to her fairy godmother who works her magic to take the ordinary and make it extraordinary. A pumpkin becomes a stagecoach, mice become horses, lizards turn into footmen and a rat into the driver, her horrible clothes become beautiful, everything is transformed until the end of the night. When people saw her and what she arrived in they thought it was a person who was rich, they thought it was a princess! But what they thought it was, and what it actually was, were two very different things.

 This is true for the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, it’s true also for Judgment Day. Jesus Christ, the man who hung on the cross to die, was seen by all as a defeated King, dying in mockery and utter defeat. The rulers scoff at him, look at this guy! He saved other people, but he can’t save himself. Which would give the impression that God couldn’t send a legion of angels to kill all of them and save His own Son. The assumption is he’s not able to be saved, that he has found himself in this predicament and that his life is being taken from him. That’s the perception, but not the reality. The soldiers mock him, offering him sour wine, a cruel joke giving the honor of being cupbearers for a king but in this instance their mockery was actually closer to the truth than they realized. Jesus was a King, a King worthy of servants. A King of great authority who sits on a throne of glory even as you hear these words this morning, a King seated in Glory at the right hand of God. A King who we even could say, on the throne of the cross, was finishing the work of peace within His kingdom, by making the payment of sin for the lives of everyone who ever dwelt in His creation. They saw defeat, when in reality it was victory. They saw a weak shell of a man who hung in agony, when in reality it was the King of creation in which all things hold together.

 The thief initially saw what everyone else did, hurling insults at Jesus with the other who was being crucified, we read about them adding to the insults of others in Matthew chapter 27:44. But then something changes. He sees more than just a man being killed for blasphemy and any other made-up charge. He sees the truth. He puts it all together. He sees the truth about Jesus, and the truth about himself. That’s the power of the cross, it’s the hard understanding about the death of Jesus Christ. Jesus doesn’t deserve to die, but he gives himself up on the cross as a sacrifice for my sins. I’m the problem. I’m the sinner. And in the same way that the coach turned back into a pumpkin, and the horses into mice, and the footmen into lizards, and the driver into a rat, and the beautiful clothes, back into filthy rags, when we see the perfection of Jesus, and his death on the cross, we have to lay our trophies at his feet, we have to humble ourselves, and recognize that we put him there. Our sin nailed him to the cross. It was because of our rebellion. All the things that we think aren’t a big deal, all the Commandments we break not recognizing the severity of our actions, the flippant way we deal with the Law of God and think nothing of our sin….that attitude, when we truly see the cross for what it is, which is the punishment we deserve, it is a sobering thought. It is the revelation of our unworthiness to be part of God’s kingdom. It can even lead to us seeing Christ’s return as the King coming in vengeance to destroy his enemies, and you and I would both be in that camp. We’d never want Jesus to return, because we’d be destroyed for putting him through that agony!

 But the thief sees the truth, and Jesus welcomes him into his kingdom. No wrath. Just forgiveness. Even for a man who earlier that day was hurling insults at him. Even for a man who was a convicted criminal. It’s simple, repent and be saved. Or as the hymn writer puts it in our Sermon Hymn. “Sinners, whose love can ne’er forget, the wormwood and the gall, Go spread your trophies at his feet, and crown him Lord of all.” Wormwood and gall, bitterness, the gall given to Jesus on the cross, the bitter taste, the reality of the cross, it’s not pleasant to face the truth that your sin is why he hangs in agony, but go spread your trophies at his feet, lay aside your pride, your accomplishments, all the stuff that makes you think you deserve His death, or you deserve a great place in the Kingdom of God, and crown Him Lord of all. In him all things hold together, including your very salvation, won by his blood on the cross. The place where he has made peace by his blood. The place where you see his love for you, because he gives up his life willingly to save you. His love is so great he died even for his enemies. His forgiveness is so complete that you come to receive, and He gives you what your soul needs and the victory is complete in the blood of his cross, the peace between you and God is accomplished not by you, but by what Jesus did for you.

 As the Church Year ends we look to the return of this King of love. The King of Kings. When he comes back to take us to be with him. Again, the veil will be lifted and we will see the truth. While the signs of his return are all around us, we do not need to fear them. His return isn’t something that should make us uneasy or worried, but rather something we should welcome with great joy. The initial perception of the End Times is a scary one, but like the cross, we have to see what is truly going on. We don’t pray that Jesus wouldn’t come, we pray “Come, Lord Jesus” Come quickly! Come and save us from this world of sin and pain. Come as our King and take us to be with you. So don’t fear the King of Kings as some ruler of wrath, welcome him and his return as your beloved Savior, and may God bless us in the Church Year to come.

Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding keep our hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen.