

**Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Lena, IL – 20 November 2022**  
**Christ the King - Year C**

**1st Reading: *Jeremiah 23:1-6***

**Psalm: 46**

**2nd Reading: *Colossians 1:11-20***

**Gospel: *Luke 23:33-43***

**Sermon - *Vicar Thomas J. Mosbø***

In the name of the Father, ✠ and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

When Betty first asked me if we were going to wear hats for Christ the King Sunday, so she could put it in the newsletter, my first reaction was: Why would we do that? But then I looked into it, and discovered that it is a “thing” that some churches have done. And although it isn’t really my kind of “thing”, I thought that it might be an interesting idea to dip into this year.

The question of whether or not to wear a hat when worshipping God actually has a very long history. In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul writes that men should not cover their heads when worshipping, but that women should cover their heads. And he says that this has been the custom in all the synagogues as long as anyone can remember. So this was the Jewish custom in New Testament times.

And what is particularly interesting about this is that the modern Jewish custom is exactly the reverse: Jewish men now always wear a Yarmulke during worship, and often wear one at all times in public, but Jewish women do not cover their heads. And it seems that this custom began roughly 400 years ago, a long time by our reckoning, but still quite recent compared to the whole history of Judaism and Christianity.

Christians, however, have for the most part continued to follow Paul’s advice. Not only is it considered disrespectful for a man to wear a hat during worship [unless you are a bishop], but I was taught as a boy that it is disrespectful for a man to wear a hat indoors at all. If I am wearing a hat when it is cold, I must remove it as soon as I enter a building. And I expect that many of you were taught the same thing. So I must admit that it makes me rather uncomfortable to be wearing this hat today inside the sanctuary, and I expect it will be a one-time phenomenon. And I will be removing it before celebrating communion this morning.

Women, on the other hand, have always been encouraged to wear hats in church, and most especially for Easter Sunday. So, I find it quite a good sign to see so many hats this morning.

And, of course, the type of hat we wear can tell us a great deal about ourselves. The cap I am wearing this morning identifies me as a man from the north of England, and I have a little story about that. An American acquaintance of ours who was attending Durham University when we were living there told us how one evening as he was returning to his residence, he was jeered and insulted by some local lads, and he didn't understand why. So Coral pointed out to him that he was wearing a cap that identified him as a posh, well-to-do member of the upper classes, attending university, whereas they were poorer, working-class, and resented his position in society.

And there are many other types of hats that might reveal who we are: police hats, military helmets, baseball caps, bowlers, cowboy hats. And so we come to what we are celebrating today: Christ the King. And, of course, it is pretty obvious what type of hat a king wears: a crown. King Charles of the United Kingdom has yet to be permitted to wear his crown until his coronation next year. But what about Jesus?

Well, we have already sung the hymn "Crown him with many crowns", so we have already been thinking about this today. Today is the last Sunday in the church year, the culmination of everything we have heard and celebrated since last Advent. And as we have approached this Sunday, we have been reading about Jesus' second coming, when (as we recite in the Creed) "he will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end".

So, does this mean that Jesus has not yet become king, that he is still waiting for his own coronation? It is very tempting to think that the first time around Jesus came in humility, kept his divinity under wraps, pretended to be meek and mild, and allowed himself to be beaten, crucified, killed. But watch out! Next time we'll see the real Jesus, and he'll pay them all back!

Well, I have real difficulties with that picture of Jesus. One key verse for me is Hebrews 13:8 - "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever." The Jesus who will return in glory is the same Jesus who was crucified, died, and is risen. Remember what the angel told the disciples at Jesus' ascension in Acts 1: "This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven." That account was written by Luke, from whose Gospel we just read.

And what does Luke tell us about Christ the King this morning? That he has already been crowned, with a crown of thorns; that he has been enthroned, on a cross; that those who sat on his right and on his left in his kingdom were two criminals, one who rejected his kingship, and one who accepted him, and was given the promise of eternal life. And Luke tells us that instead of paying back those who crucified him, Christ the King prayed: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do".

This is a king and a God who gives himself for his people lavishly and generously. This is the Jesus whose kingdom will have no end, and who offers citizenship in that kingdom to everyone, but just like the two criminals on their crosses, we too have the choice of either accepting or rejecting the salvation Jesus offers.

There is a saying I like that in the end there will be two types of people: those who say to God, "Your will be done", and those to whom God says, "Your will be done". Jesus, the same Jesus who allowed himself to be crucified for our salvation, *will* come to judge the living and the dead. And his judgement will be either that we have accepted his salvation, his love, and the life he wills us to have, or that we have rejected him, his love, and the wonderful life he offers us.

And if we reject him, then what more can he do to save us than to give his very life to us? If we say by our words and our life, "No, we do not want the crucified God", then he will allow us to be separated from him, just as the first criminal chose. That choice leads to weeping and gnashing of teeth, not because God wants to punish those who make such a choice, but because to reject Jesus is to reject the life and joy he offers. But if we accept him, and choose to live out our lives in the Holy Spirit whom we received in our baptism, forgiving others as he has forgiven us, giving our lives in love to those for whom Christ the King also died, then we will live with him eternally in his kingdom.

The choice is ours.

Amen!

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