

Luke 23:33-43, Christ the King Sunday, 11/20/2016

Imagine you have been standing there near the cross with the other people who came to watch.

You hear the pounding of the hammers on the nails, the cries of pain,

and feel the shock to your senses and the terror of the images you will never be able to erase from your memory.

You hear the mourning of loved ones gathered as the crucifixions proceed.

You hear the mocking words of the Leaders and soldiers.

Your senses have captured the smells,

the feeling of death hanging heavy in the air.

This is no place to be, but it is too late.

Then you hear the words,

“Father forgive them...

...today you will be with me in paradise.”

With the breath used to speak those words a wisp of fresh air clears the dizziness from your head.

In that moment you realize something different, something powerful, something new has happened in the crucifixion of this man.

Against everything your brain is screaming at you, you look up
and see Jesus hanging between two criminals,
one repentant and the other not.

One will see him in paradise and the other only hears the sound
of the promise for his friend, and hangs there with the rage and
terror of his circumstance;

both sinners, one repentant the other not.

Jesus has the power of life and death over those who believe and
those who don't, just like a king.

But king? Is this really a king hanging on a cross?

Is this a king whose only crown is a bundle of thorns?

Jesus, as he hangs on a cross dying with two criminals practices
what He has been preaching throughout His brief ministry.

He practices forgiveness,

Father forgive them...

He gives life, frees the captive, and heals the sick and lame.

...today you will be with me in paradise.

These are the words and the actions of the king of God's
kingdom.

Jesus has spent much time describing the kingdom of God
during his ministry.

The kingdom is like the shepherd who goes off to find the one lost sheep leaving the 99 behind,

or the rich man who gives a party and invites the poor and blind and lame when the rich don't have the time for him.

It is like the mustard seed and yeast that starts so small and blossoms into something so significant and beneficial.

In Chapter 8 Luke says, "...he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God."

And once when asked when that kingdom would come Jesus said to the Pharisees,

"The kingdom of God is not coming with things that can be observed; nor will they say, "Look, here it is!" or "There it is!" For in fact the kingdom of God is among you."

It was everywhere; everywhere that Jesus went!

The kingdom of God was even on that hill where Jesus hung on a cross dying.

You can hear it in the words Jesus spoke,

"Forgive..." "...with me in paradise"

Where is God's Kingdom today?

A tired trucker stops to help out an old lady along side the road with a flat tire.

He then stops to help a young boy whose dog had run out into the road and been killed by a speeding car right before

his eyes. He comforts the boy and gives an encouraging word to his mom.

When he arrives at the truck stop he sits down to eat and Sal takes his order. On the radio the trucker can hear a religious service and all of a sudden a voice says:

Brothers and Sisters, Jesus is coming!

And there was a small chorus of Amens
Yes I tell you Jesus is coming again! But there's something else you need to know.

The congregation got more enthusiastic

He's not only going to come sometime in the future. No, I say, not only some time in the future, he's coming now!

There was applause in the congregation

He's coming now and you won't even know where, when, or how. No! You may not even know who he is.

But he's coming!

He may even have been that stranger you met today."

He may have even been that stranger you met today.

Did Christ return to you today, or yesterday, or last week in the stranger you met, or the friend you talked with?

Did Christ return to someone today, or yesterday, or last week when you were the stranger or friend?

It is Christ the King Sunday today,

“Where is this Kingdom whose king is Christ?”

You have probably thought to yourself, with all the things that are going on in the world it is hard to see that God is anywhere around.

You don't experience the fullness of God's kingdom and that is what makes it hard to see, and to know that it even exists.

But you do get glimpses of it.

So where do you go looking for Christ?

Where is God's Kingdom today?

First you look to Christ himself.

In the scriptures, in your relationship with Him,

in worship and all the words and actions carried out here,

in holy places and unholy places,

in this place and the bar down the street,

the least likely places you would think to look for Him you believe, but those are the places Jesus hung out.

You look to Christ in the eyes of your spouse or a dear friend and in the eyes of a stranger or your enemy.

When Jesus comes no matter where, when or how, the kingdom comes.

It is among you.

Our Colossians passage says in verse 15 *He[Jesus] is the image of the invisible God...*

The Greek word is *eikwv* which means image or likeness.

From that comes our English word “icon.”

You know what an icon is on your computer, Ipad or cell phone. It is the same thing.

They are the little pictures that are the visible image of a program or some place you may want to go in the computer or on the internet that you can't see,

and if you click on that icon, it will take you where you want to go

or show you what you want to see.

Jesus is like an icon. He is the image of the invisible God wherever you find him; even hanging on a cross.

Click on Jesus and a whole new world opens up;
you will see God.

Click on Jesus and He will take you to the place He calls his kingdom,

click on Jesus and He will take you to paradise.

His kingdom in this world is seen and experienced in the foretastes of the kingdom as our songs, liturgy and meal remind us.

His kingdom comes each and every time you hear Jesus' words of forgiveness,

and the words that promise paradise directed at each of you just as surely as they were directed at that criminal hanging on the cross next to Him.

The kingdom comes when you pray the Lord's Prayer.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

WHAT ARE WE PRAYING FOR--

the fulfillment and realization of God's kingdom in this world, in this life.

The kingdom can, will and does come into this world in which we live, into your very lives,

but the kingdom can only come with the king,
in the king's presence, through the king's words and actions.

The kingdom is on your tongue and in your hands and under your feet.

The kingdom over which Jesus reigns is made real in the kind words you say to a stranger, in the forgiveness you grant to the one who hurts you,

in the words of love you share with your loved ones and your enemy,

the tenderness you show a child or word of encouragement given to a mom who needs to comfort her child, or a father who grieves.

You heard the story of the trucker. Was he Christ's presence in the world? Did he bring Christ's kingdom into the world?

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Yes I tell you Jesus is coming again! But there's something else you need to know.

He's not only going to come sometime in the future. No, I say, not only some time in the future, he's coming now!

He's coming now and you won't even know where, when, or how. No! You may not even know who he is.

But he's coming!

He may even come when you are the stranger someone else meets today or tomorrow when they see Christ the King in you.