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Palm Sunday/Sunday of the Passion
Sermons
April 17, 2011

MATTHEW 27:11-56 - "KING OF THE JEWS"

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

Even though our American forefathers rebelled against their king and said, we shall have kings no more, their offspring have continued to be fascinated with all things kingly. Many Americans seem to regard the royals of the House of Windsor to be their kings, queens, princes, and princesses. Just look at how many Americans are excited about the up and coming royal wedding between Prince William and Kate Middleton.

Whether people officially have a king or not the idea of a king or kingship has certainly captured the thoughts and imaginations of most. We almost instinctively know what a king is and what a king does. Kings wear crowns and other kingly apparel; they sit enthroned in honor and glory, live in palaces, and have the best things available to them. Kings reign and rule; that is they exercise the power and authority of their office, with varying degrees of freedom and limitation (from an absolute monarch to a constitutional monarch). In days of old kings protected their people by establishing law, judging the law, and enforcing the law. Kings waged war against enemies and in turn made peace. Kings were central in creating and maintaining an ordered society. Being ruled by a king could be good or bad, depending largely upon the person who was reigning as king.

The ancient Hebrews or Jews had kings and a kingly house, the royal House of David. God told the prophet Samuel to anoint David the shepherd as King over Israel, the King of the Jews. God established David's reign as King. God gave David victory over his enemies his whole life and promised that an offspring of David would always reign as King over Israel. To the detriment of both their people and themselves successors who reigned as King of the Jews took God's gracious promise as a license to act and do as they liked and ignored the Law of God which was to govern the kingship. Because these kings and the people rebelled and broke God's Law, God sent the King of Babylon with his armies to capture and destroy the holy and royal city of Jerusalem, where the Temple was and from where the House of David reigned. Though slaughtered and taken into exile, God saved a remnant of the people, preserved the royal line of David, and promised His people through the prophets that days were coming when they would return to Jerusalem and restore the reign of David's Son as King. Further it was promised that this Son of David would be the Christ, the Anointed One who would reign not only over Israel but over the nations as well.

It was with these promises of the Christ, the Son of David, in mind that crowds in Jerusalem welcomed and hailed Jesus as King of the Jews on the first Palm Sunday. Just outside Jerusalem in Bethphage, Jesus told His disciples to bring Him a donkey colt, a royal symbol of the House of David, because of the words of the prophet Zechariah (9:9), *“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is He, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”*

Matthew 21:6-11 record these events: *6 And the disciples went and did just as Jesus commanded them; 7 they led the donkey and the colt and set their cloaks upon them, and He sat upon them. 8 And most of the crowd spread their cloaks upon the way, and others cut off branches from the trees and spread them on the way. 9 And the crowds that were going before Him and after Him began to cry out saying, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the One who comes in the name of the LORD! Hosanna in the highest!” 10 And after He entered Jerusalem all the city was shaken saying, “Who is this One?” 11 And the crowds were saying, “He is the prophet Jesus, the one from Nazareth of Galilee.”*

The wise men or magi were the first people in Matthew’s Gospel to declare that Jesus was the King of the Jews. They traveled from afar to the holy and royal city of Jerusalem to welcome Him and give Him gifts, but they did not find Jesus there. The one born King of the Jews was instead found in a simple house in Bethlehem not a palace. But now that Jesus was full grown and had been preaching, teaching, and doing signs and wonders in Israel the crowds of Jews were ready to proclaim Jesus, King of the Jews.

Jesus had preached the coming of the kingdom of heaven; He declared that God’s kingly activity, His power and authority to right all wrongs, to deal with evil, to save His people, and restore creation were present in Himself. Jesus cast out demons, He healed the sick, and raised the dead. Jesus taught with authority. Jesus had forgiven sinners, called tax collectors to be His disciples and even called the Pharisees to repentance. It is no wonder that the crowds in Jerusalem were all excited and stirred up as Jesus entered Jerusalem. There was much anticipation and anxiety in the air of what might be, if indeed Jesus was the Christ, the King of the Jews.

The Jewish leaders in Jerusalem felt threatened by Jesus and feared Him, because He upset the delicate balance of power they held under Roman authority and dared to call them to repentance. They determined that Jesus must die! Over the course of four days they used their power, influence, and lies to have Jesus arrested and falsely accused before a makeshift tribunal in the middle of the night; then they handed Jesus over the Roman governor, Pilate, charging Him as a rebel and an insurrectionist against Roman authority.

11 Now Jesus was stood before the governor; and the governor asked Him saying, “Are You the King of the Jews?” And Jesus said, “You, yourself, say.” 12 And with this He was charged by chief-priests and the elders, but He did not reply. 13 Then Pilate said to

Him, "Do You not hear how many charges they are bringing against You?" 14 And He did not reply to him, not with one word, with the result that the governor was very amazed (Matthew 27:11-14).

It is finally here in Matthew 27, as Jesus is handed over to Pilate to be judged, declared just, and yet sentenced to death by crucifixion that God reveals to those hearing the Gospel of Matthew what it means for Jesus to be the King of the Jews. It is at the cross of Jesus that the kingdom of heaven, God's kingly activity, is revealed. But this is certainly not what we would expect, nor any other person. A suffering Christ, a crucified King is not what the Jewish crowds were expecting when they hailed Jesus as Christ and King. A suffering Christ, a crucified King, was categorically rejected by the Jewish leaders. A suffering Christ, a crucified King, was incomprehensible and denied even by Jesus' disciples, even when He told them that this must be. A suffering Christ, a crucified King, not the sort of king that we would like to follow.

33 And they came to the place called Golgotha, which is called the Place of the Skull, 34 and they gave to Him wine having been mixed with gall to drink; and after tasting it He was not willing to drink. 35 And after they crucified Him they divided among themselves His garments by casting lots, 36 and they sat guarding Him there. 37 And they had placed above His head the charge against Him which read, "This is Jesus the King of the Jews." 38 Then they crucified with Him two robbers, one on His right and one on His left. 39 And those who were passing kept on blaspheming Him shaking their heads 40 and saying, "The One who would destroy the Temple and on the third day build it, save Yourself, if You are the Son of God, and come down from the cross." 41 Likewise also the chief-priests with the scribes and the elders kept on mocking Him saying, 42 "He saved others, He is not able to save Himself; He is the King of Israel, let Him come down now from the cross and we will believe in Him." 43 He has trusted in God, let Him rescue Him now, if He delights in Him; for He said that, 'I am the Son of God.'" 44 And also the robbers who were crucified with Him were mocking Him. 45 From the sixth hour darkness happened upon all the land until the ninth hour. 46 And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a great voice saying, "Eli, Eli lema sabachthani," this is, "My God, My God why have You forsaken Me?" 47 And some who were standing there heard and said that, "He is calling Elijah." 48 And immediately one from them ran and took a sponge full of wine and wrapped it around a stick to give Him drink. 49 And the rest were saying, "Hold up, let us see if Elijah is coming to save Him." 50 But Jesus again called out in a great voice and gave up His spirit.

51 And behold the curtain of the Temple was torn in two from top until the bottom and the earth shook and the rocks split, 52 and the tombs were opened and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, 53 and they came out from the tombs after He was raised and entered into the holy city and appeared to many. 54 But the centurion and those who were guarding Jesus with him, when they saw the earthquake and the things which happened they were very afraid saying, "Truly He was the Son of God." 55 And there were many women there from afar watching, which one followed Jesus from Galilee in order to serve Him; 56 in which was Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Joseph and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.

Before Jesus' suffering and death, the mother of James and John, the sons of Zebedee, had asked Jesus for a favor. She said, "*Say that these two sons of mine are to sit, one at Your right hand and one at Your left, in Your kingdom.*" Jesus answered, "*You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am to drink?*" They said to Him, "*We are able.*" He said to them, "*You will drink My cup, but to sit at My right hand and at My left is not Mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by My Father*" (Matthew 20:22-23). Jesus' kingdom, Jesus' reign as king, was not what James, John, nor their mother had in mind. They thought to gain honor, glory, authority, and power over the other disciples; they were thinking according to the world, according to the sinful flesh.

Jesus' coronation as King of the Jews did not happen in the Temple or in a palace accompanied by loving and rejoicing fanfare, sumptuous feasting, and celebration, according to the ways of man. Instead according to the ways of God, Jesus' coronation as King of the Jews took place on His cross, as He was crucified with a criminal on His right and a criminal on His left and Jesus the just in between.

To the eyes Jesus' reign as King of the Jews from the cross was a sham and great shame. The cross is not the glory of kings, but a place of humiliation, suffering, and death. How pathetic looking, Jesus a Jew, stripped, scourged, and hanging as a criminal! Where were all His signs, wonders, and miracles at the cross?

But to the hearing of faith, yes there on the cross Jesus reigned as King of the Jews, to save His people from their sins, to die as the ransom for the many, to reconcile all the nations to God. The kingdom of heaven was at hand, present, in the cross of Christ Jesus; God was actively battling sin, death, and the devil in the flesh and blood of Jesus as He hung upon the cross and died. Jesus is the eternal Son of God and at the cross He acted as the faithful and obedient Son of God. Jesus purposefully stayed on the cross and gave Himself to save others. Jesus is the King of Israel, the King of the Jews, He stayed on the cross because He trusted perfectly in His Father, even as He suffered and died. As the King of the Jews, Jesus gave His body and shed His blood on the cross to cover our sin; Jesus stayed on the cross until death, so that we might believe in Him.

Jesus may not be the kind of king that we want, but He is the King that we all need. Jesus went to Jerusalem, was rejected by the Jewish leaders, handed over to the Romans, suffered, was crucified, died, buried, and rose again, because He is the King of the Jews. Jesus had the power and the authority to come off the cross and save Himself, but it was His will to reign for you from the cross, it was the Father's will to deal with evil- sin, death, and the devil, in this way.

Jesus' reign as King of the Jews is for you and has come to you. You have been baptized into the King's reign, baptized into His death and resurrection. The Kings forgiveness has been proclaimed to you. The body that Jesus gave and the blood that Jesus shed on the cross to cover your sins and reconcile you to the Father is given to you again this day for your forgiveness. The eyes only see bread and wine. The eyes only see a man in robes speaking and making gestures with his hands. The eyes only see water poured over the head. But there by Jesus' Word and promise the reign of Christ the King is present in, with, and under the bread and wine; in, with, and under the words vocalized by the pastor; in, with, and under the water. The hearing of faith trusts what God has declared and promised despite the appearance of things by sight.

Jesus is the Christ, the King of the Jews. His glory is revealed in His cross, where He suffered and died to save His people from His sins. From the cross Jesus reigns, with sinners on the right and sinners on the left, and He the Just One crucified in their midst for them. Thanks be to God, for Christ Jesus, the suffering and crucified, King of the Jews, Amen!