

The Rev. Michael C. Fedewa

Feast of Christ the King

November 25, 2007

Jeremiah 23:1-6

Colossians 1:11-20

Luke 23:35-43

Perhaps it came at the stroke of midnight Thursday night, perhaps at 4:00am Friday, perhaps it came as early as some time Thursday itself. I am not sure when exactly it happened, but at sometime over the past few days the Thanksgiving holiday ended and the Christmas holiday season began. At some time, I am not sure exactly when, the turkey, sweet potatoes and pumpkin pie were put away, and we began to focus on what has become the most important piece of our thanksgiving weekend, Christmas shopping. Doesn't Thursday already seem to be so long ago? Isn't all the attention already focused on the Christmas Holiday that we will celebrate one month from today?

In keeping with the Spirit of the Season, I too would like to focus my sermon for this Feast of Christ the King on Christmas. I would like to focus though not on the Christmas that comes one month from today, but rather on the Feast of Christmas that we celebrated 11 months ago, Christmas 2006. On the Feast of Christmas 2006 we heard the story of the birth of Jesus from the Gospel of Luke. In that story we heard of Mary saying yes to the angel as she consented to be the mother of Jesus. We heard of the Spirit of God coming over Mary and by the power of the spirit, that she conceived a son in her womb. We heard of the birth of Jesus outside Jerusalem in a small town of Bethlehem. We heard of him being laid in a wooden manger, and wrapped in swaddling clothes. We heard of shepherds keeping watch over their flocks, and the angels announcing to them "news of great joy" that a savior has been born. We heard of the heavenly hosts filling the heavens and proclaiming this great news.

With that Christmas story from the beginning chapters of the Gospel of Luke in our mind then, I would invite you again to ponder today's Gospel from the ending chapters of Luke that we just heard proclaimed. Between these stories, we see some very deep connections. The story takes place once again, near Jerusalem, not in Bethlehem but on Calvary. Keeping watch are not shepherds but a crowd of people. Standing guard, are not angels but soldiers. Jesus is not laid in a wooden manger, but nailed to the wooden cross. There is no swaddling cloth, Jesus has been stripped and his garments divided. Instead of angels announcing his birth, there is an inscription which announces the reason for his crucifixion. In just a few verses after the Gospel story of today, Jesus commits the spirit that came upon him in the womb of Mary back to his heavenly Father. After the death of Jesus, a centurion declares news that this was an innocent man.

Luke skillfully frames the life of earthly Jesus with these two connected stories. In between these stories, Luke has focused much of his Gospel on the mercy and compassion of Jesus. In Luke, Jesus is presented as truly one with the people. He is surrounded by ordinary people; women, children, the poor, the lame, the outcasts. He is moved by the sufferings and sorrows of widows and orphans. In Luke Jesus reveals the depth of God's mercy. In Luke, Jesus tells the story of the lost coin, the lost sheep and the lost son. In Luke the woman, known to be a sinner, washes the feet of Jesus with her hair. In Luke Jesus visits the home of the tax collector Zacchaeus. The mercy and compassion of God revealed in Jesus are central in the Gospel of Luke that we have been hearing since last Christmas. Today on this Feast of Christ the King, Luke presents us with one last, great story of compassion and mercy. Today Luke presents us with the story of the thief crucified with Jesus.

Jesus has ascended to the throne of his cross. As he is crucified, he shares the sentence of death with the outcasts and criminals. He is not a king who is distant from his people, but one who is with them even as he shares in their shameful suffering and death. He is a king, who has been stripped of every symbol of royalty----except one. He still holds his power to pardon. Jesus, the compassionate and merciful king forgives the criminal and promises him that he will accompany Jesus into paradise. Today, the criminal will share the reign of God.

Dear friends that is the promise given to us this day as well. Jesus is a compassionate and merciful king who promises us that we will share in the reign of God.

Decades earlier, in the hymn that we heard read today from Colossians, Paul proclaims that in Jesus the fullness of power of the creator came dwell on earth. This hymn reaches in climax in the proclamation that on the cross Jesus reconciled all things on earth and in heaven. In Christ all that is destroyed by sin is restored. In Christ all that is torn apart is made one. Even more, the hymn proclaims, the reign that began in Jesus at his birth, the mercy revealed in Jesus at his death, continues in and through his body the Church

Jesus the compassionate and merciful one continues his reign of reconciliation through us and in us, and with us even to today.

So, dear friends, as we end our holiday weekend celebrating the Feast of Christ the King, let us look forward to the Feast of Christmas that we will celebrate in one month. Let us prepare for that feast not primarily in looking for sales and bargains in gifts to purchase and wrap. Let us look forward to Christmas by looking for ways to seek reconciliation in acts of compassion and mercy. From the cross, Jesus offered the gift of forgiveness to one person. In that one act of mercy, he revealed his power over all creation. Perhaps, in the midst of many gifts of compassion that we will be invited to share in the month to come, we can seek and offer the gift of reconciliation to one person. May we pray for one who has wronged us, one whom we have wronged. May we remember one person in our life who has, like us been forgiven by our merciful God. May we forgive them as we have been forgiven. May Christ, whose death we remember and whose birth we celebrate continue his work of reconciliation and forgiveness through us. May our gifts of compassion, our gifts of mercy, our gifts of forgiveness bring the reign of Christ to reality in our world.

That will indeed be the greatest gift that we can give.