

Christ the King-C

NOVEMBER 21, 2004

*When they came to the place that is called The Skull,
they crucified Jesus there with the
criminals,
one on his right and one on his left.*

*Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing."
And they cast lots to divide his clothing.*

*And the people stood by, watching;
but the leaders scoffed at him, saying,
"He saved others; let him save
himself if he is the Messiah 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."*

*One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying,
"Are you not the Messiah?
Save yourself and us!"*

Luke does not use the word, Golgotha,
but says that Jesus was crucified at a
place called the Skull.

We think of the crucifixion as taking place on a hilltop,
but none of the Gospels mentions
a hill.

The crucifixion of Jesus is the climax of a prolonged ritual of degrading criminals...
which included beatings, public abuse
and ultimately public crucifixion.

The ritual is designed to strip a person of their honor and permits the people to abuse him.

"Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing."

This prayer seemed to many to be out of place,
but isn't it consistent with what Jesus
taught?

- Jesus taught the disciples to love their enemies and to pray for those who abuse them. Here he practices what he preaches.

- Jesus' concern for the ignorance of those executing him is much like his concern for the ignorance of the people of Jerusalem...
for whom he wept.

For whom is Jesus praying?

Most likely his prayer includes not only the soldiers, who inflict his wounds,
but also for the Jewish leaders who
instigated the crucifixion,
the crowd that had demanded it, and
the disciples who (except for
the women who are standing at
a distance)
are nowhere to be found.

Even for Judas!

"And they cast lots to divide his clothing."

For these soldiers, it was another day, another dollar -- business as usual -- just another dirty job!

It was, in fact, a day that would change the world,
but the soldiers missed its significance
completely.

Once they had hoisted a cross into place,
they faced a long, boring wait.

Casting lots to see who would win Jesus' clothing would create an interesting diversion for a few minutes.

Days earlier, a woman with a hemorrhage had touched the fringe of Jesus' clothing and,
in that instant, had received healing.

Where the woman had seen power, however, the soldiers now see only a pile of dirty clothing...worth, at best,
a few coins.

How often we focus on the trivial while great things happen around us!

It is worth noting that other soldiers relate quite differently to Jesus in Matthew's Gospel.....

Remember in chapter 7, the centurion's faith exceeds anything that Jesus has found in Israel.

At the conclusion of the crucifixion, another centurion praises God and proclaims, "*Certainly, this man was innocent*"

Three groups taunt Jesus.

The leaders scoff,
the soldiers mock; and
the criminal to his right derides him.

In each case, their taunting is tied to a the idea of salvation...based on Jesus' claim to be Messiah.

If Jesus is messiah, his mission is salvation.

How can he save the people if he cannot

even save himself?

The ironies, of course, are that:

- The cross is the place where Jesus in fact effects salvation.
- If he were to save himself, he would abort that salvation ministry he was sent to accomplish.
- He prays for the salvation of those who are taunting him.
- And he saves the repentant criminal.

The three taunts from the Jewish leaders,
the soldiers and the criminal,
all echo the three temptations
of Jesus in the desert 3 years earlier .

Remember, when Jesus wandered for 40 days in the desert, the devil had said,

- 1- *"If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread."* "
- 2- *If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.*
- 3- *"If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here."*

Now the Jewish leaders say to Jesus,
"Let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!"

The soldiers say,
"If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!"

The criminal says,
*"Are you not the Messiah?
Save yourself and us!"*

All three challenge his kingship....his role as messiah.

In each of these six challenges, Jesus is tempted to use his power for selfish purposes instead of servant purposes.

In each instance, he holds fast to his mission and thereby defeats the tempter.

We, too, are tempted to question Jesus' kingship.

If Jesus is king, why does he permit evil?

Oscar Cullmann in *Christ and Time* suggests that Christ's work on earth was rather like the Normandy invasion in 1944.

It set in motion the forces that were to win the victory,
but many battles remain to be fought
before the final victory.

What happens to Jesus on the cross fulfills several prophecies:

- From the Psalms which say...
"All who see me mock me;

they insult me,
they shake their heads"

- And again in the Psalms it says...

"They divide my clothes among themselves, and for my clothing they cast lots"

- and also...

"They gave me poison for food, and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink"

Continuing with the passage...

But the other criminal rebuked him, saying, *"Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of death?"*

And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong."

Then he said,

"Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

Jesus replied,

"Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

Both criminals ask for salvation.

The first does so out of unbelief,

"Are you not the Messiah?

Save yourself and us!"

and the second does so out of faith...

"Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

The first acknowledges no wrong, and criticizes Jesus.

The second acknowledges his guilt and Jesus' innocence.

The first wants only to be freed from his cross so that he can resume life as he has lived it.

The second asks for Jesus to remember him when Jesus comes into his kingdom...

a much more significant vision of
salvation.

The first received nothing, and

the second received all that he asked.

Jesus is truly a king, and exercises his power of pardon.

Here, during his trial and execution,

as so often in Luke's Gospel,

Jesus again shows concern for the
poor, women, children, the outcast,
and the Gentile.

That is the kind of king we have...

a servant-king...

always thinking more about others
than of his own welfare.

In a kingdom, the king sets the standards for behavior.

As his disciples, we are called to behave
as Jesus did.

As we move into Advent and toward Christmas,

may we find ourselves thinking more of
others..

less of ourselves..

Less quick to defend ourselves, when attacked....

whether rightly or wrongly,

and quick to acknowledge our guilt when we're wrong...

seeking forgiveness from the king of
kings...

that we can one day be with him in
paradise.

Amen.