

Themes over the last couple of weeks have largely been pointing to being ready because Christ is coming again. We've heard about trumpet blasts that will announce Christ's arrival. We've talked about angels that will accompany him in glory. We've listened to how all the dead will rise from their graves and bow down to him as Lord. We've even heard about the great separation of believers from unbelievers that only Jesus can administer. Jesus certainly is coming as powerful Savior and Redeemer and will be recognized by all for who he is.

But not today. Not in the lesson this morning. Jesus wasn't even seen as a great teacher or a prophet like he might today. The great works and message he shared weren't enough to wow people like today. He looked like just another wrongly accused criminal put to death on a cross by the Romans. He just didn't look like the conquering hero we expect to see on the Last Day. He just didn't look like a king.

We're looking at one of the worst days for Jesus this morning in the gospel. It's a low point, the moment where the soldiers take him out back and humiliate him. They're not holding back, in their mind he's a criminal who can be treated however they want. It's in that very moment, one of the worst of his life that we actually see our Savior for who he is...

Christ our King reigns

In lowly suffering

In majestic sacrifice

"Hey, let's head to the Praetorium, I hear they're bringing in that Jesus guy. We could go have some fun." Your soldier friend is talking about the talk of the entire company of soldiers. He's actually in the middle of his trial right now and Pontius Pilate, the governor, has ordered that he be roughed up a bit. It seems he's being overly cruel to this one criminal, but he also tried to have this Jesus released. Giving him over to a bunch of angry soldiers who don't like Jews seems dangerous though.

Your first glimpse of Jesus is shocking. This is the criminal everyone seems to want dead. Bloodied and bruised Jesus limps into the middle of 600 Roman soldiers. Instantly his clothes are ripped off of him and someone tosses an old scarlet robe on him. The dirt and dried sweat in the robe touch his open wounds and burn. Someone shouts, "Look at the king now." But no king is complete without a crown. So someone twists one together from some bushes nearby. The thorns are long and you grimace as it is smashed on his head. Within seconds blood is running down his face. "Get him a staff", shouts another. A bunch of reeds is shoved into his right hand to pretend it's a staff. He's got all the trappings of a king. He's wearing the robe, he's got the crown, and he's holding a scepter. But he looks nothing like a king. He's suffering.

Processing the scene you're more amazed at Jesus' reaction. Jesus never once shoves back or mumbles curses under his breath. He doesn't glare at anyone. You've heard things about him, about miracles and authority. The soldiers who arrested him said they couldn't help but fall to the ground when he told them who he was. But the man in front of you hardly resembles a man much less a king. Yet the soldiers kneel down in front of him and shout, "***Hail, king of the Jews!***" You know none believes it. They're mocking to make him suffer. Then it gets worse. Each soldier takes his turn approaching Jesus and spitting on him. It's the ultimate disgraceful act. Jesus doesn't move a muscle. He would not fight back today.

If such a disgraceful thing happened today to an innocent man we wouldn't be here. We take pride in thinking we'd stand up against such open humiliation of another human being. We would turn away, decline to participate, or better yet stop it. But we weren't there that day standing among the soldiers. We only listen to the description of the horror and suffering. What's worst of all, we did participate that day against Jesus. We may not have spit or pushed the crown of thorns on his head. But the truth is that he was suffering there not for himself, but for our sins. Those sins we think we've buried so deep, those Jesus was being mocked for. Those sins we commit that border on open rejection because others see how little we seem to care about God. Those too are sins Jesus endured this suffering for. All big sins and small ones you've committed Jesus was carrying. Ones we remember because we can't forget and those we've forgotten. Jesus was suffering for all of them, yours and mine. He thought about us during his lowly suffering.

It had to be that way. Jesus had to willingly suffer. That's why he didn't speak up or fight back. That's why none of his disciples were at his side suffering the same treatment. He had to go it alone. He had to know suffering completely. We deserved it for our sins but he took it. In the middle of this lowly suffering Jesus remained perfect. His perfection meant that his suffering had a purpose. He gave it for the whole world. He gave it for you and me. In lowly suffering Christ our King reigns.

We expect kings to wear royal purple, sit on thrones with scepters, and wear crowns. This is expected of kings because of their majesty and their position. When the opposite happens it's shocking. Kings mingling with the common folk or especially one suffering public humiliation and torture is shocking. Jesus did all of that and still was a king. His suffering in fact made him that much more a king. It meant he could use his suffering to make a majestic sacrifice.

"You know he'll get the cross," another soldier whispers to you. You've never seen anyone die that way before but you've heard plenty of reports. It sounds like quite possibly the worst way to die. This suffering Jesus faced might actually help. The closer he's beaten to death, the faster his suffering on the cross would be over. Finally they stop spitting and pounding on his head. The fun is gone because Pilate has ordered the prisoner brought before the people again. Minutes later Jesus returns still wearing the scarlet robe and crown of thorns. Not surprisingly the people have called for crucifixion. Pilate was unwilling or unable to stop it. The march to the cross begins.

Majestic is the last word to describe the scene in Pilate's courtroom among the soldiers. Jesus is beaten to within inches of his life only to go to the cross where his life would be taken completely. The blood and the spit don't make for a majestic picture. But the majesty only comes through when we know the end. ***"Then they led him away to crucify him."*** That's the key. The cross is where Jesus' sacrifice is made complete. It gives purpose to the suffering. Jesus suffers to make the sacrifice. Nothing could stop him from making that sacrifice. He knew exactly what he was doing and why he was doing it. Rejected by Jews and Gentiles Jesus would sacrifice himself for both so that some might believe and be saved.

Our only question is why. Why would anyone sacrifice like that? Why would anyone willingly subject themselves to suffering and sacrifice on a scale we shiver to think about? We'll do almost anything to avoid sacrifice. We air condition our homes in the summer so we don't suffer and heat them in the winter so we don't suffer. We use plenty of money to have closets full of extra clothes, shoes, and coats. We have Xboxes, Wii's, and Playstations with so many games we can't remember them all just so we never are bored. Medication allows us to avoid pain and Band-Aids make little ones feel better. Sacrifice isn't something we're willing to endure if we can help it. Nothing like what Jesus did.

Even though everything in the picture of the king were fake, the crown, the robe, and the scepter, they showed him for who he really was. It was a full picture of grace. Christ was sacrificing completely based on grace for us. He sacrificed the comforts of heaven for the beatings of earth. He willingly went to the cross to be the sacrifice for sins; he did nothing to avoid it. It is really in the sacrifice of this moment that Jesus is seen most clearly as a king. He rules over all because he willingly gave himself for all among the soldiers and ultimately on the cross.

His work not to be duplicated. He didn't come to suffer so we might follow the same path to suffering. He wants us to hear the account of his suffering and sacrifice and believe it. He wants us to know that the cross was something he didn't avoid but went to for us because he loved us. He wants us to sacrifice where we can for others to take the opportunity to show them love as he has loved us. Christ Jesus is the King. He is the King of kings and Lord of lords. Christ Jesus is our king and he reigns today for us.