

Christ Is Our King - Sermon by Veronica Garcia-Robles

I don't know about you, but I have been greatly troubled by the state of our world...especially within the United States. And as a US citizen, my mind like so many other Americans has been preoccupied with the recent Presidential election. One of the main things I have worried the most about is the rampant amount of hatred, prejudice, racism, sexism and generally the negative, destructive behaviors and language that the Trump campaign introduced and which too many of his voters have adopted in their destructive words and actions after his win... It troubled me greatly to watch so many people follow a man who openly spoke so badly and hatefully of minorities, people of color, people of different religions, of different sexual orientations, of gender...The slurs he spewed seemed to prey on and exploit the prejudice and fears of many people...and whether some perhaps followed because he wasn't a politician and hoped the system might be changed, many seemed to follow because his words resonated with the fears and hatred that many people have over others who are different than they are...fears that have brought out the worst in them...making them think it is somehow now acceptable to follow suit and openly attack people verbally or physically, allowing free reign to their bigotry, racism, prejudice and the myriad of other intolerances they hold. And, those fears and intolerances, when dwelled upon and fed, grows thick like a stifling fog, taking over rationality...taking over decency...taking over the notion of tolerance, fairness or justice...taking over the goodness that can be inherent in our humanity...if only we fed the good rather than the bad.

It was the imagery of this type of fear-ridden and hate-filled mob that struck a chord with me as I read our scripture for today on the crucifixion of Christ...and, as I read the passage of Luke, in my mind, I was transported to the image that the scripture describes in such clear detail...and if you would, I'd like you to imagine that day with me...

We are at a place called The Skull, which is said to be just outside Jerusalem's city walls and is a mount that looks like the upper part of a skull. And, there are three men hanging from crosses at the peak of this mount. Jesus is in the middle with the criminals on either side of him. Meanwhile, surrounding the mount are crowds of loud people.

Some were women beating their breasts and wailing for Jesus. Most, others, however, were those who had feared him, derided him, hated him...or had shouted out to Pilot "crucify him".

Here, there were many people who were following their fears and intolerances by condemning to death an innocent man they could not control...a man who didn't always play by the rules of their society...who upset the money-changing tables in the temple, spent time with those that society shunned, welcomed the children to come to him, interacted with Samaritans, went to the home of hated tax collectors and spoke to and stood by women. Jesus was a man who didn't need to stroke the egos of the righteous but instead sought out to save the sinner who needed forgiveness...Jesus was a man who championed the minorities of society, the disenfranchised, the sick, the untouchable, women, children, widows, orphans, lepers, Samaritans, Gentiles, those whom society in general tended to shun, demonize, ignore, belittle, cast off...all because they were not like them, because they were different, an unknown quantity and that, for them, was enough cause to fear them...and by many means, to separate themselves from them.

So here we are amongst these fearful and angry people at The Skull who were being led by others instigating and preying on their fears...religious leaders who saw their leadership positions threatened because they couldn't make Jesus fit into the box that they wanted him to fit into...so, they caused a situation where they could get rid of their rival which ultimately led him to the cross at The Skull.

And, make no mistake...there is chaos at the mount...there is anger and division...there is confusion and grief...there is wailing and laughter...there is mocking and slurs being thrown about...there is the permeating sickness of elation from those who are happy to see Jesus' death...those who resented his attention on those whom the society shunned...those who feared his leadership power over others...and there is the unholy sense of foreboding and inevitability as all who have come to The Skull now await Death to come have the last word and claim the lives they have offered up to it.

It was a dark moment...

It was a dark moment for Jesus to look upon...

And it was a dark moment for the crowds to gaze upon the cross...because that cross symbolized every sin of that crowd...that cross embodied every sin of humanity...that cross represented not simply death, but the very brokenness of our world...that cross depicts our damaged souls and ruined earth...that cross, made with human hands and stained with the blood of Christ. This is where our sins put our Lord...this is where our transgressions hung our King...upon that cross.

And, as he hung on that cross, looking out at the chaotic sea of faces...You would think that he would curse them all for their treachery, as any human might...but our Divine Jesus cried out "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." Instead of condemnation, he showed mercy...he showed love...he showed his true Kingship.

Not even when people mocked him, did our Lord waver. Those leading the crucifixion mocked Jesus saying "He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one." The soldiers also mocked him, offering him sour wine and saying "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself". Even one of the dying criminals beside him mocked him saying, "Are you not the Messiah, save yourself and us." They mocked him and their scornful words had a double meaning...not only as an insult but their attempt to bully and tempt Jesus to show his divine power...the power that would have proved to them his worthiness to become the human king they had earlier wanted to force him to become...and their mockery carries echoes of similarity to the three temptations Jesus faced near the start of his ministry when Satan tried to tempt him in the wilderness to also show his divine power and accept a human crown to rule over the world if only Jesus was selfish enough to save himself and bow down to Satan.

But, here's the thing...No temptation is great enough to tempt Jesus, our King, to betray His Father...and nothing could tempt him to give up his claim on our souls. Our King is Divine...a Heavenly King that is not tempted or tainted by earthly things...but who was born into this world to give us a glimpse of our awesome, amazing, omnipotent God...a God who never gives up on us, even in our darkest hour...a God who washes away our deepest, darkest sins with the innocence of his sacrificial blood...a God who loves the world so much, that he gave his only Son...so that whoever believes in him, will not perish but have eternal life with him...just as I imagine that the criminal who recognized

Jesus as his King would have been granted, when he asked "Jesus, remember me, when you come into your kingdom".

That repentant criminal understood that death was nothing, if he had his King by his side. Death will not have the final word, not even on the darkest day of our King...because Death cannot contain our King...and even though our mortal bodies will in time succumb to death, our souls were paid for, claimed and saved by the very blood of our King...Our King turned that darkest of days into his greatest triumph...breaking the chains of our sin that held us captive to free us to fly into the arms of our God...Saving us from ourselves...Saving us with his undying love.

Today is Christ the King Sunday, and traditionally the church began celebrating this day after the First World War when Pope Pius the XI was concerned about a growing secularism and saw that though the war's hostilities had stopped, true peace had not yet been achieved...rivalries had not ceased and class divisions and nationalism still abounded...So, the pope declared that only through the Kingship of Christ as the Prince of Peace could true peace be found...so the church began celebrating Christ the King Sunday to remind us as Christians not only who our true King is as opposed to all our earthly rulers...but also to remind us that we are the seeds of His Kingdom and we must live our lives knowing that our King is among us.

Christ is our King in all things. Yes, we live in the world and abide by the rules of our earthly leaders, but Christ has dominion over all...the world could not trap him into an earthly crown...his crown is heavenly...his dominion over our world was never achieved by preying on the fears of others, as we have so recently seen take place in the US election...no money bought him his heavenly throne...he used no violence or corruption in to gain his Kingship...His Kingdom is not sullied by human fear, or greed or lust for power...Our Divine King looked upon those human temptations, shaking his head in pity...because where our earthly leaders in their limited, broken humanity might succumb to these temptations, our King and Savior Jesus Christ does not.

Though the earth may tremble and we may stumble, Jesus is our rock...We are not on our own! Our scripture in Colossians tells us "God will strengthen you with his own great power so that you will not give up when troubles come" and God "made you able to have a share in all that He has prepared for his people in the kingdom of light"

(Colossians 1:11-12). Colossians also tells us that "through Christ, God has brought all things back to himself again—things on earth and things in heaven. God made peace through the blood of Christ's death on the cross." (Colossians 1:20)

When we needed a King, Jesus was there...and we continue to need our King and His peace in our world...a peace that only Jesus can provide...in this broken world of ours, we need him more each day that passes by...we need his calming presence in our lives...we need his teaching in our minds...we need his understanding in our hearts...we need the power of his words in our ear...we need him to direct our hands, our actions and our speech. We need his guidance, to become the people our God created us to be...

People who bring light and love into the world...not darkness or hatred...people who instead of judging others, take the time to get to know them...people who stand with others and help them in their time of need...people who take a chance in shining their light to make the world a brighter place...and in this regard, I have been greatly encouraged by the many people within the US that have risen up against hatred and injustice - standing in solidarity with those in need...and though we could never earn God's love by our actions, our actions as Christians, can help God's light shine brighter, longer and farther in the world when we choose to be reflections of His love...Where Jesus is our Prince of Peace, his church is where he plants his seeds of peace and grows his love, sympathy, forgiveness, empathy, caring, kindness, and compassion...through each and every one of us - his people - and which He calls us to share as we live our lives in this world - especially with those who need it the most.

No matter how dark and broken our world may seem, Christ is our King who will see us through the long, cold night...until we all turn to him and say, "Jesus, remember me, when you come into your kingdom."...for He is our salvation, He is our hope and only He is our King.

Amen.