

Matthew 27:27-31 *Then the governor's soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole company of soldiers around him. ²⁸They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, ²⁹and then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand. Then they knelt in front of him and mocked him. "Hail, king of the Jews!" they said. ³⁰They spit on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again. ³¹After they had mocked him, they took off the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him.*

Dear friends in Christ our Savior,

He didn't look much like a king. The Gospel Lesson which is the basis for our sermon doesn't paint a picture of triumph. We've talked about this last Sunday of the Church year as Christ the King Sunday—a day for us to rejoice and celebrate our King, Jesus, and the triumph that he won. This doesn't look much like a triumphant king. It certainly isn't the picture most have in their heads when they think of a king. As Americans, we have a fascination with kings and royalty. 30 million Americans got up early to watch the last royal wedding hoping to get a glimpse of the pomp and circumstance that comes from royalty. Everyone was dressed in their best attire. They followed the proper protocol right down to the last minute detail. The crowds gathered in adoration to cheer and celebrate the royal family. There were the strong horses carrying the protective guards. When we think of a king—much less a victorious, triumphant king, these are the type of pictures in our head.

How different the scene Matthew records for us! This looks to be anything but a victorious king. In fact, this is just the portrait Pontius Pilate wanted to paint of Jesus. Pilate knew Jesus to be innocent of the crimes of which he was accused but wasn't strong enough to simply declare him innocent. He wanted to influence the hearts of the Jewish people to lead them to see how preposterous their charges were and develop a pity and compassion in their hearts that would allow him to release Jesus. In his attempt to save Jesus from crucifixion, he suggested to the Jews as graphically as possible: You think this man is a king? This man who is so impotent that my soldiers can flog and ridicule and mock him at will? Why press for the death of such a king? The idea that this man could do any harm to your nation is ludicrous and pathetic! Pilate wanted them to see how ridiculous their claim was that Jesus could be a king who was a threat to either the Roman or Jewish nation.

What Jesus had endured was tremendous! What we have described for us in this text took place after he had been flogged. Roman floggings consisted of 39 lashes of a whip that was embedded with shards of metal and glass. Roman floggings were known for being so brutal that sometimes the victim died before they could get him up on the cross. After this they brought him into the Praetorium where a whole company of soldiers gathered around him—probably anywhere from 600-1000 men. Everything these soldiers did to him was intended to mock him. Their goal was to humiliate and embarrass him. They stripped him of his clothes and outfitted him with every symbol of royalty that would have signified the power and position of a king. They put a scarlet robe on him—a mock imitation of the purple robes which royalty wore. The crown of thorns was meant to be a cheap and painful imitation of the radiant crown depicted of Tiberius Caesar on the Roman coins. The staff of reeds in his hands imitated the royal scepter that Caesar held on his coins. In mock praise and worship, the soldiers fell down before him with laughter and ridicule in their voices scoffing, "Hail, king of the Jews." Then they started to spit on him—think about how humiliating this act is. They took the mock scepter and began to hit him, the verb which was used to describe this implies that they were repeatedly striking him over and over. He would have been bruised and battered. Blood would have been flowing down his face and back. He would have looked rough and haggard. This is hardly the picture we would have in our minds of a triumphant king.

But this tells us something about our King. How different our King is from the kings of the earth! An earthly king never would have allowed this type of treatment. The kings of this earth rule for power and glory and success and money. They are concerned about their legacy and how other people view them. They use their power to solidify their own position. They use their position for their own gain. Even if they start with good intentions, most forget that their role as king and leader is about service. Their role should be about serving the people who are under them. If they serve, they serve only for their own benefit or in ways which will bring benefit to themselves. Earthly kings and leaders place themselves above the people. They look down on their citizens in a condescending manner as lesser people. To bolster their strength and power, they never allow a weakness to be shown and never admit a mistake. Everything they do is done to make themselves look better. They exalt themselves and proclaim themselves to be untouchable.

How different our King! Though this sight doesn't seem regal or triumphant, we have the opportunity in this scene to see exactly what kind of a king we have. He did not come to be an earthly king or establish an earthly kingdom. This is why the Jews rejected him. He came to establish a spiritual kingdom where he rules in the hearts of his people. To do that, he needed to win the battle against the enemy which held his people captive. That enemy is sin. Sin held his people captive and if nothing was done would have separated his people from him eternally. So Jesus came to do battle against sin which required him to serve his people by putting himself in their shoes to suffer what they deserved to suffer. This is where we see the greatness of our king as we look at this gruesome sight. We might look at these soldiers and wonder how mere mortals could treat the eternal God in this way. In shock and awe we might ask, "How could they?" The reality

is that they were not allowed to treat Jesus this way because he was powerless to do anything about it. We see here what theologians speak of as Jesus' passive obedience. He obeyed his heavenly Father by allowing himself to be treated in such a horrible, terrible way. He could have fought against this treatment. He could have avoided this suffering. But he allowed himself to be treated in this way because that's what was necessary for your salvation. Here is the greatness of our Savior: his focus was not on his glory but yours. His concern was your gain not his. He was not afraid to be humiliated. He didn't lash out with his power when he was mocked and ridiculed. He carried out the role a king is supposed to carry out: he served the citizens of his kingdom by doing what was necessary to save them eternally even if that meant enduring humiliating and painful mockery and ridicule, even if it meant death and facing hell itself. Rather than seeking to exalt himself, Jesus humbled himself to endure all of this so that we can be exalted to live with him eternally.

This is how you and I can look at this gruesome scene and see victory and triumph. Don't feel sorry for Jesus as this scene unfolds. Don't pity him. Instead rejoice at your king's love for you that he was willing to endure this for you. All this Jesus did for you. When you stop to ponder all that Jesus endured, it really strikes us. We typically talk about Jesus' suffering and dying for us as if it were just a walk in the park. This scene which we see here tells a much different story. This scene should arouse in us a guilt for our sins and a sincere gratefulness and thanksgiving for the love of our king who willingly endured this on our behalf. We have a hard time fathoming that this is what we deserve for our sin. Just one sin—one little lie, one word screamed in anger, one rude or unloving comment, one word of gossip or slander, one deceitful action—just one makes us worthy of God's eternal punishment in hell. We don't like to face this fact and may find it quite harsh to hear. Yet this is the truth God declares in his Word. This is a battle we cannot win.

While we step back and wonder how these soldiers could treat Jesus in this way, we have to ask, "Don't we do the same at times?" We don't always accept the king Jesus came to be but try to make him into the king we want him to be. We don't always look to him as the King who rules over our hearts and minds. Like many in our world today, at times we want to push aside what God says and go out and do our own thing. We look to him to be there to protect and provide for us when we need him but to stay in the background and leave us alone to do our own thing the rest of the time. Rather than trusting his care for us, we instantly accuse him of evil when things go wrong. We mock and ridicule him when our words say one thing but our actions show something completely different. Or fear and worry as we face difficult situations display our lack of trust in him as our King. Yes, we too, like these soldiers, have failed to worship perfectly our Savior and King.

This is what makes our King so outstanding: he went forward to win the battle for us anyway. It was for our sins that our Savior and King was treated in this brutal, humiliating way. More than talk and empty promises, Jesus went forward to suffer the hell we deserve for our sins and rescue us from the enemy of death. Because of this, we see victory in this scene. Because of this we see a triumphant King. We see a King who endured hell to win the battle and bring salvation to us.

So worship him. Worship him today as you raise your voices in loud praise of your king who reigns supreme. Worship him as you bring your generous offerings forward in full confidence that your king will provide for your every need. Worship him as you bring your prayers and petitions before him confident that he hears you and assured that he will answer them according to his gracious will and for your eternal good. Let your worship continue as you leave God's house and go out in to the world. Our king now reigns victoriously on heaven's throne for the benefit of his people. God the Father has given him all power and authority and has placed all things under his feet so that he can rule for the benefit and glory of his church. How comforting this is in a world where chaos seems to reign and it seems at times as if no one is in control. How encouraging this news as we face the tough times that can come in this world. As you find yourself questioning how you'll have enough to feed your family or provide an education for your children or make your house payment, be encouraged to know that your God reigns and will help you in all things. When illness comes, find your strength in knowing God will use it for your eternal good. When tragedy strikes, be comforted that God has not abandoned you. See the love of your Savior as he went forward to defeat sin, death and the devil to graciously give you the certainty of sins forgiven and eternal life and be assured that he will not leave you alone to face the trials of this world by yourself. Worship your king by seeking to follow his word in all things and to carry out his will in your life. Worship your king by seeing the mission which God has laid before you to proclaim his love to the people of our world. Worship him by setting aside your own thoughts and desires to pursue those things which honor and glorify God. Your king reigns supreme on heaven's throne. Worship him in every aspect of your life in praise and thanksgiving for all that he has done for you.

What a way for us to bring this church year to a close. Throughout this past year, we've had the opportunity to review all the aspects of Jesus' life and our lives of faith. We've looked at the difficulties we faced, pleaded for forgiveness for our sins, faced challenges and obstacles, asked for guidance, wisdom and discernment and begged for protection and care. Through all of this, we can look forward and know that in the end, no matter what we face, our King stands victorious. We have a King who can and will defeat all enemies. We have a King who displayed his deep love for us in Jerusalem 2000 years ago and will reign with that same servant heart until he comes again. While many look at this picture in our text in pity and mockery. We look at our Savior and see his beauty. We see in our King his love, grace and triumph. Find your strength and comfort in his power and reign. Rejoice at his love. Be encouraged with his promises. Raise your voices and give over your lives as you **Worship Your King**. Amen.