

**Sermon for the Last Sunday after Pentecost: Christ the King,
November 24, 2019**

Solemn Mass

By the Reverend Stephen Gerth

Year C, Proper 27: Jeremiah 23:1–6; Psalm 46:1–8; Colossians 1:11–20; Luke 19:29–40**

There are two gospel passages that may be read on this last Sunday of the church year when on most Sundays the gospel lesson is from Luke. The passage we did not hear is the short narrative from Luke’s account of the crucifixion in which two wrongdoers, who were crucified with Jesus, speak to him. One of the two, the only person in Luke to address the Lord by his personal name, which means, “Savior” or “He will save,”¹ and also “The Lord has saved,”² is the wrongdoer who says, to the other who has mocked Jesus, “We are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.”³ Turning to Jesus, this man says, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your

¹ Matthew 1:21. *The Oxford Annotated The Apocrypha of the Old Testament Revised Standard Version Expanded Edition containing the Third and Fourth Books of the Maccabees and Psalm 151*, ed. Bruce M. Metzger (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 1172, n.21.

² Luke 1:31. *New Oxford Annotated Bible: New Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha, An Ecumenical Study Bible*, ed. Michael D. Coogan, 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 1839, n.31.

³ Luke 23:41.

kingdom.”⁴ Jesus responds, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.”⁵

In Luke, salvation touches the lives of many before Jesus’ death and resurrection.⁶ But his crucifixion is a passage we hear every three years on the Sunday we commonly call “Palm Sunday”—even though the main event of the Eucharist on that day isn’t Jesus’ entry, but his death: The Sunday of the Passion.

Jesus’ movement and entry into Jerusalem in all four gospels is shaped by each evangelist’s understanding of how Jesus Christ is himself the Good News. There are no palms or branches in Luke’s account of Jesus’ approach to Jerusalem, just clothes, garments, thrown on the colt and on the ground—a poor man’s saddle, a poor man’s red carpet, if you will. It’s in Luke that Jesus says, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head.”⁷ The late New Testament scholar Joseph Fitzmyer, a Jesuit priest, wrote [Jesus] “comes to Jerusalem as a pilgrim who is hailed as a king, and prepares for his destiny, his

⁴ Luke 23:42.

⁵ Luke 23:43.

⁶ Luke 7:36–50, The Woman who was a Sinner; 8:42b–48, The Hemorrhaging Woman; 19:1–10, Zacchaeus.

⁷ Luke 9:58.

passion, his transit to the Father.”⁸ His purpose is, we know, misunderstood by his disciples and by the crowds.

In Luke, the Risen Jesus will need explain to two of his disciples on the road to Emmaus, “Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory? . . . [And Jesus] interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.”⁹ To make sure we get the point, late that same night of the resurrection, when the two have returned to Jerusalem to be with the other disciples, Jesus appears to them and says, “ ‘Everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled.’ . . . [and] ‘Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.’ ”¹⁰

In all four gospels, the crowds acclaim Jesus. Matthew follows Mark pretty closely. John and Luke share similarities between their narratives. But it is in Luke

⁸ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, Anchor Bible 28, 28A (Garden City: Doubleday, 1985), II:1245–46.

⁹ Luke 24:26–27.

¹⁰ Luke 24:46–47.

that God has made clear that God himself—herself—God’s self—is ruling God’s people. God decided Mary would be the mother of his Son (“You will conceive . . . and bear”).¹¹ Luke’s Jesus knows that there will be an animal for him to ride on. He sends two for the colt. When the owners want to know what these men are doing, they answer with the words Jesus has given them, “The Lord has need of it.”¹² End of discussion.

(Acknowledging that I’m not a New Testament scholar, in Luke, I think the argument to think of the sacred and unspoken Hebrew name for God when the Greek word *κύριος*—“Kyrie”—“Lord”—appears is a strong one.¹³)

In Mark, Matthew, and Luke, Jesus cleanses the temple when he arrives in Jerusalem. And in the cleansed temple, Jesus proclaims, “That the dead are raised, even Moses showed, in the passage about the bush, where he calls the Lord the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. Now”—present tense—“[God] is not God of the dead, but of the living; for all live to him.”¹⁴

¹¹ Luke 1:31.

¹² Luke 19:29–34.

¹³ See C. Kavin Rowe, “Luke and the Trinity: An Essay in Ecclesial Biblical Theology,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 56 (2003), 1–26.

¹⁴ Luke 20:37–38.

And so we come to the kingship of Christ—the sovereignty of Christ—the dominion of Christ—the rule of Christ. Remember that in New Testament Greek the word translated as “kingdom” does not refer to geography but to sovereign power. I believe God has touched the lives of everyone in this room with faith, at some level, in the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Even when there are periods in every life when it may be hard for any of us to hold our doubts at bay, we also believe that Jesus is the shepherd who comes looking for us and for all people whenever we may have lost our way.

✠ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Copyright © 2019 The Society of the Free Church of St. Mary the Virgin, New York, New York.

All rights reserved.