

After the resurrection as the good news of the Gospel spread the phrase which forms the title of today's sermon was the affirmation of those early believers. *Christos Kyrious*; the Greek words for Christ and Lord or Master. They greeted each other with this phrase. It was both a confession of Christ's lordship as the anointed one of God and also an avowal of their loyalty as Christ's disciples. That Christ is Lord is what we celebrate today. As we come to the end of another church year, we rejoice that Christ is Lord and reigns with God. That is the theme of the music which supplements our worship liturgy. We proclaim Christ is Lord. But what do we really mean when we offer this confession/proclamation; especially when we use the phrase Christ is King? Is proclaiming Christ as Lord the same as announcing that Christ is King? That is sometimes hard for us to decide because within the culture of this country kingship is not an easy concept to discuss or understand. The founding fathers rejected the concept of a king who ruled so we have not experienced that governmental structure in our lifetimes. We have studied history and perhaps some principals of civics, but any observation of kingship within political systems comes from either academic studies or observations about how kings function in other places. We tend to reject the notion that someone should rule over us. We place a high value on our independence and self-rule and have little respect for the concept of functioning royalty. We might enjoy treating the rulers of other places as celebrities, but acknowledging that as a position of power is foreign to us. If you add into this mix the fact that the gospel reading from Luke this morning is describing events at the crucifixion. The scene from Luke is from the Passion narrative and describes Jesus being taken to Golgotha in the company of two men who were condemned thieves. The purpose of this place is execution in a most horrific manner designed to illustrate the power of Rome over life and death. Included in this passage are many instances of Jesus being humiliated and mocked by those present. There seems to be little in this passage which is related to an image of kings and royalty. This passage is often part of the discussion as we near Easter. At that time of the year, the resurrection image is close and we can easily jump over the crucifixion itself and proclaim God's victory in Christ over sin and death. But maybe the distance from the Easter celebration is why we have this particular passage today. We are approaching that moment in our faith story when we celebrate that God descends to live among us. God become incarnate; takes on flesh and becomes like us. We will soon celebrate this beginning of the narrative. We know that Jesus will grow from that baby whose birth we celebrate to be a teacher who gathers disciples, a healer of the sick and one who demonstrates God's love for the world. That demonstration of God's love is in the passage we have today—Christ was born to set his face to Jerusalem and there be crucified on the cross. This year we have listened to Luke tell us of Jesus' work among us—his teachings and his ministry. Now we come to what at first seems to be the end of the story—the cross. Since Easter and the story of the resurrection is either several months behind or a few months ahead of where we are in the story...maybe looking at this passage today is a good time to stop and think about how it relates to Jesus' own understanding of his kingship. To think about what this kingdom where Christ reigns is like. Within this passage of about a dozen verses, there are four questions asked of or about Jesus related to his being king. Verse 35 states, "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 present there have divided his clothes and also mock him saying in verse 37, “If you are the king of the Jews save yourself!” Both groups had an understanding—an image of what kingship looked like and despite the inscription placed over Jesus’ head proclaiming that Jesus was indeed the King of the Jews, the contrast between the sign and the reality of what was happening to Jesus did not fit with their concept of kingship. The placard also seemed to be a mocking question asking is the one below this sign someone who could be a king over a people. The common understanding of the day by Romans and the Jewish people was that a king was someone who was powerful. Surely the expected Jewish Messiah, the one chosen by God, would be someone powerful enough to mount an army and free the Jews from the Roman occupation. They say, look at him, although he healed others he can’t even save himself. This taunting by the leaders and the soldiers are part of the humiliation of Jesus which is meant by those in power not only to kill Jesus and eliminate any threat he might be to them, but to make sure that those who followed him, those crowds who came to him for healing and hope lost all that hope. As if it wasn’t enough, one of those thieves being crucified with him joins in with his own derision saying, “Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!” This man wants to be saved—he wants off that cross now. Most of us are familiar with this passage in the general sense. We have heard the mockery within the questions asked of Jesus before. But have you ever noticed that Jesus does not reply to any of these deriding questions or remarks? Throughout his ministry Jesus has usually responded to questions asked of him, even by those seeking to discredit him. Admittedly his response has not been so much an answer as a turning around of the question to a question whose answer discredits them. But here there is no response at all. Now it would be easy to assume that this lack of response is because of the physical suffering of Christ on the cross. Yet there are more questions in this passage. The next question however is not directed to Jesus, but comes from the second thief and is addressed to the thief who mocked Jesus. Verse 40 comes from the thief on the other side of Jesus and asks the mocking thief, “Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done no wrong.” This criminal has recognized Jesus as innocent, but even beyond that he recognizes that Jesus, despite the appearances, is a king who will come into his kingdom. And inclusion is what he then asks, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” To this request, Jesus replies, “Truly, I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.” Even on the cross, Jesus ministers to those who see and seek him.

Never during his life on earth did Jesus seek fame, riches, wealth, or power. What he did do was to seek those who would follow him. Within the Gospel accounts Jesus calls disciples with the simple phrase, “Follow me.” This phrase is spoken by Jesus seventeen times. Jesus seeks out followers who live out his teachings. He has told his disciples that they must be like him, one who cares for and serves others. Early believers called themselves followers of the way and the way was to claim Christ as Lord and serve others. This example of service was what Christ came to teach. He did not come to establish or re-establish a Jewish political state. He is the Messiah, the anointed one, the chosen one of God. But the demonstration of the power that he has is certainly not power as the world understands power. Since we don’t like to talk or think about unpleasant things it is easy to skip this portion of the narrative of Jesus’ life which takes place on the cross. It is more reassuring to focus on the events after this; the

power of God which is shown in the resurrection which proves all those who scoffed so wrong. The power of Rome and the leaders did not prevail. Christ rose. This is the vision of Christ that we like to dwell upon. In this vision of Christ as the all-powerful King it is easy to think that he will rescue us from all physical hardships and prevent any bad things from happening to us. This is not what Scripture tells us the kingship of Christ is about. Do you remember the narrative in Luke which describes the events after Jesus' baptism? After the Spirit descended and claimed Jesus as the beloved Son, the Spirit drove Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan. There are three temptations described here and they were all about the temptation to use his power as Messiah for things that were not part of God's plan. The humiliation and taunting we see in today's passage are also forms of temptation to use the power he possesses as God's son in ways God did not plan. The questions by the scoffers contain that amazingly powerful two letter word "if". If you are the Messiah, save yourself; if you are the Messiah save us. Although when Luke describes the three temptations, he concludes the passage saying that Satan left Jesus...until an opportune time. Susan R. Garratt has written a book on the temptations of Jesus through the gospel lens. She includes the humiliations, the mocking, the derision suffered by Jesus in the final days of his life and on the cross as temptations which Jesus also faced. These also were temptations to use power in ways which were not according to the purposes of God. Jesus did not succumb to these temptations either, but remained true to his work on earth: to proclaim the good news of God's love and to reconcile us to God. This brings us back to our starting point this morning...a consideration of the kingship of Christ. What is the understanding which we should have of kingship as we proclaim "Christ is King." What does it mean to have and be faithful to a Savior who does not save himself? Jesus is brought to the cross because he has expressed himself in terms which challenge the status quo of the worldly kingdom represented by Rome and the religious leaders. He asserts and expresses the value of those considered valueless. He gathers people; he announces change and embodies it in the relationships he has with all those he encounters. He eats with sinners. He exposes hypocrisy. He calls for change to happen here; to happen now. He repeatedly states that the kingdom of God is near. The message he brings is that God's values should be found in the here and now. That God values all people. Jesus was powerful and assertive, he chose to change the standard by which things are judged. Greatness is no longer found in might and dominion, but in service. The image of Christ the King is one of a life poured out in compassion even in the midst of cruelty and corruption. Christ is a King who proclaims mercy and forgiveness. When we proclaim Christ is King, we proclaim that the values of the world are not the values we cherish. They are not the values we choose to live by. When we proclaim Christos Kyrious, we declare that we affirm that Christ is indeed king of our lives and we choose to give our allegiance to him. We declare that we view the world in the new light shown in Christ. We declare that we are called to a different way of being in relationship with God and with each other. Thanks be to God that Christ is Lord indeed, today and every day.