

“WHAT WILL YOU DO WITH YOUR KING?”
Matthew 27:27-31

“Behold, your King!” Those were Pilate’s words to the Jews gathered before him on Good Friday. Shortly after, he put the King Jesus’ fate in the hands of his people with the question, “Shall I crucify your king?” Matthew does the same as Pilate – he sets our King before us. On Christ the King Sunday it is appropriate to find the answer to the question of what should be done with our King. What will you do with your King? Matthew’s account gives us the answer to the question.

Jesus’ triumphal arrival to shouts and praise in Jerusalem was as close as our King would come to receiving the adoration he deserved. We see him later, humbly washing dirty feet, in a dim, smoky, upper room bathed in the spicy smell of a Passover meal. Later still, we find him abandoned by his followers and bound like a prisoner in the cool damp air of Gethsemane. He bows under the illegal will of the religious leaders, the mockery of the high priest, and the foolishness of King Herod, finally to stand before Pilate and his spineless evasion of truth – “I am innocent of this man’s blood. It is your responsibility.”

As Matthew begins you can feel the cold as the soldiers’ sandals clack through the stone halls, dragging the condemned into the courtyard of the Praetorium, their fortress. Even in the growing brightness of 8:00 AM, the soldiers gather – men of various Roman provinces – self-proclaimed Jew-haters. They gather eager at the opportunity to mock and torture another prisoner. The smoky air of the courtyard buzzes with tension and excitement as dirty, calloused, blood-stained hands push the king before his audience. They mockingly worship the king. It is what he deserves after all.

“Come, let’s worship the king,” they say to one another.

In the dim dawn and fire-light his blood-stained clothes are torn aside, revealing the earlier flogging – long, ragged tears in his back and arms. Blood flows freely again from newly opened wounds. And they robe their king – a short, wool, soldier’s cloak, stained and tattered, drapes his torn shoulders – a cheaply dyed mockery of royalty.

As the king is dressed in his “finery”, his coronation is being prepared. Painful, vicious, effort had been put forth to crown this king. Heavy, blood-pricked hands present the crown – a woven circle of thorns. Hair, scalp, and thorns meet as the crown is pressed onto his head – blood runs into his hair, down his face. And now, the final kingly ornament is presented – a scepter – wooden and plain, someone’s walking staff – placed in the king’s right hand – his symbol of honor and power.

“Come, let’s worship the king,” they say to one another. Laughter and foul language rise and fall as the king’s Roman audience kneels before him – robed in purple and red, bruises and blood. “Hail, king of the Jews!” someone shouts; more laughter from the crowd; the shout is raised again, this time by more, “Hail, king of the Jews!” It doesn’t die either; grubby executioners raise the chant, loud and fast – until the throbbing shouts urge first one, then others to spit at the king. And finally, in the close, sweaty, heat of laughter, shouting, nudging, and cursing – someone grabs the scepter and strikes the king. Blood flows faster as the thorns are driven further, knots and bruises rise with every fall of the scepter. And at the end, tired, maybe bored, the audience once again becomes the soldiers with a gruesome task. Finery of thorns and wool are removed, and the stumbling weak king becomes the condemned “criminal” once again.

This is a disgusting, horrible scene isn’t it? If it were a DVD I would have turned it off by now. I can’t watch graphic violence – look how much our Savior endured! Just think of the pure evil that was raging through those people – to spit on a person and beat him with a stick. Think of all the hate and anger that incited this mockery of Jesus, who is our King. It is graphic and frightening...but we have to go back there again.

We have to go back to the stone and smoke, blood and sweat. Why be there again? Because we need to take a closer look, to examine the crowd, the sinners who would do this. There are people of all kinds among these soldiers – African, Indian, Syrian, American. There are men and women, office workers,

business owners, bank employees, pastors, vicars, and teachers. Our own faces are there, if we look closely – some right in front, others mixed in the crowd, some off in the shadows.

What do we find them doing, these people we missed before? Nothing different than the rest. We offer that mock-worship too. We help to tear away his clothes – as we join in talking behind someone's back. We place that dirty worthless robe on him. We offer him worthless leftovers – as we thoughtlessly toss a five in the offering plate. I see my own-office soft hands, your work-worn, or pretty mother's hands lifting that crown to his head, maybe pricking a finger or two in the process. In my own sinful life I have woven that crown – and at times I have worked hard to do it. It is the sins we have planned, the ones maybe we had to work hard to fulfill. That crown is my lust, or the theft that tempts you. It is your pride that allows you to talk down to others, our anger when things don't work as we want – it's you and me driving those thorns into his head with our own hands.

You too, with the soldiers, adore this king in mockery. Maybe because you only want him to be king on Sunday, or because you only give this time on Sunday because people will notice if you're not here. Maybe because you would rather sleep, which might show that you don't want Jesus to rule in your heart. In doing these things we nudge, laugh, shout, and curse with the crowd. We even spit on the king – give him what we wouldn't do to our enemy. We harm, cut and bruise him with our words and actions. "Behold, your King!"

In the final count, it is our actions, our mockery and hate that strip off that mock-royal robe and send him off to die. He goes to be crucified: to suffocate to death and die of dehydration after hours of pain – with nails in his hands and feet and rough wood in his shredded back. "He was crushed for our iniquities...and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all (Isaiah 53:5-6)." This is what we do with our King.

Do you see the real horror of that picture now that you are in it?

Do you see the real horror of that picture now that you are in it? It is horrible. But the true horror comes when I see who it is that I reject with my hate, self-love, mockery, and neglect. I reject the true King – who is described in Rev 19:11-16, "I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. "He will rule them with an iron scepter." He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS." Does it make you tremble to know that behind the mock-scepter you placed in his hand is the iron scepter that rules all nations; that behind the crown I wove are the many crowns of his almighty rule; that behind the cheap cloak is his robe dipped in blood; that behind his meek, bloody, humble appearance is the power to strike down all nations? That is what we deserve for sending the King to the cross – to be struck down – we deserve death for our rejection of Christ as King by our sinful life, thoughts, and selfish actions. We deserve eternal death, eternal separation from God, for spilling one drop of the eternal blood of the King of kings.

For repentant sinners there is real beauty in this horror. Though we dress him in a cheap robe and crown him with thorns, mock him, and reject him – he submitted to it all for us to fulfill everything God demanded. He held back eternal wisdom and almighty strength for you – who would half-heartedly acknowledge him as Lord, who would slander him like Pilate, for me who would deny him like the soldiers. Though we stood among those soldiers in sin, we also stand in the light of the setting sun with the disciples at Golgotha, to witness the perfect end to the perfect life that was lived for us, because we can't. We have watched the Savior-King die, whose blood the soldiers spilt pays for every sin we have committed, for every hateful thought, for every feeling of embarrassment at his kingship. Our King battled sin and death to make our payment – "once for all" – perfectly.

The beauty is that, in death, our "defeated" king became the victorious King of life! He offers you life instead of death. Though we stood among the soldiers in horrifying sin, we stand also with the women in

the early dawn cold at his empty tomb, listening to the angels, "He is not here. He is risen!" Paul echoes the angels as he writes our epistle – Christ defeated death, and so we will too, in all the eternal glory the Almighty King is capable of. Ezekiel reminds us of the same King, our Shepherd-King, our gentle King, who watches over us and offers forgiveness of sin and strength with his Word and Sacraments. That's what Christ the King does for his people.

Our lives are filled with love for Jesus, the King who loved us by giving his life.

What will I now do for my King? Worship – in all the ways that my mock-worship left out. We will lift up office-soft, work-worn, and pretty mother's hands to glorify his name. I will offer a life of true adoration – I will share the King, victorious over sin, with my neighbors. We will live lives that show this King rules in our hearts at all times, in kind words, loving hearts, and selfless actions, powered by his Word. Our lives are filled with love for Jesus, the

King who loved us by giving his life. What will I do with Jesus? Worship on my knees the almighty glorious one who is my gentle shepherd – the one with thundering almighty power that touches our lives with a gentle, caring, guiding hand – Christ the King!

Philip Casmer is serving as Vicar at Apostles Evangelical Lutheran Church in Billings, Montana. For contact information, please visit us as www.apostlesmt.net