

27th Sunday after Pentecost - 20 November, 2016  
Sermon preached by Darren Steadman  
Lessons: Jeremiah 23:1-6; Psalm 46; Colossians 1:11-20; Luke 23:33-43

Today, we celebrate Christ the King Sunday, the last Sunday of the church calendar year. Our year-long readings have built up to this final Sunday, all to finally say that Jesus Christ is our King!

Here's what that means to me. In the year 2011, I was a high school math teacher, and I knew that I was not going to do that for the rest of my life. It was time to move on with my career. You may not know that I was a teacher before, and you almost certainly don't know that I graduated with a degree in Biological Systems Engineering. Well, I had an engineering degree, so I thought I would give it a try. I set out to put my college education to work, and get myself a ground-level job as an engineering technician.

This was all after I had resigned from my teaching job, too. I flooded the job market with my resume that summer, I walked into engineering firms, shook hands, went to job fairs, sent a thousand emails, and after months of searching for the lowest, entry-level job that I could find, I heard nothing back.

That season of life was very humbling, and I learned a lot about the job-searching process. Number one, never quit your job first. Number two, online applications get sent deep into outer space where no one ever sees them. Number three, I should have gone hiking more, or read more books, because that would have been a better use of my time all those months.

When the holiday season came, I got a few part-time jobs. I worked at Barnes and Noble selling electronic books. I worked at UPS, delivering boxes to front doors all day until the job ended, naturally, on Christmas Eve.

But the best thing I did to fill my time was to volunteer more at my church. I had plenty of time, so I joined all the fun stuff that the youth group did, going ice skating and baking cookies, heck yes! I joined a group in our diocese called PYM – Parish Youth Ministries, where a group of high school teens plan and lead weekend retreats for other kids around our diocese. I loved it doing that the most, serving as a mentor to these young leaders, playing music with the kids for worship services, and just supporting their work as they ministered to other young people, how beautiful!

At one event, the high school seniors were honored and blessed for their upcoming graduation and moving on to the next part of their life. There was a ceremony of speeches and memories, and I wanted to sing a song to honor their new life ahead. I chose to sing Nina Simone's *Feeling Good*. "It's a new dawn, it's a new day, it's a new life for me ... and I'm feeling good." As I sang, I prayed for these young folks. I prayed that whatever they did next year, they would stay connected with church like we were at that retreat. Church was so powerful here, and it was so important to these kids, but they might let it drift off, like it so often does in a big life transition.

Then, I realized I was praying the same thing for myself. I was right there with them. I was looking into the next phase of my life, and trying so hard to use my education and my hard-earned college degree, and getting nowhere. It was a pretty sad season of life. And church

work was just something that I could do to fill my time. Until that moment. That weekend, at a retreat surrounded by high school teenagers, I made Jesus Christ my King.

It's like the old saying: "What would you do if you had all the time in the world, and if you didn't have to worry about money? – Try to make that what you do for a living." Or, as my grandmother said "If you find a job you love, you'll never work a day in your life." With all of my free time, the thing I loved doing the most was ministry – I loved talking about God and meditation and praying and including everyone in youth ministry, and that's how I filled my time. I turned to Jesus in the search for my life's work, and that was the first step that brought me here.

Our story for today shows us this type of turning to Jesus too. We see Jesus on the cross with two condemned thieves hanging beside him. One said "Are you not the Messiah, why don't you save us? And while you're at it, save me too." But the second thief sees something different. He does not say "**If** you are the Messiah ..." He turns to Jesus, and he knows who he is talking to. He says "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." He is saying "Jesus you are the Messiah, the Christ, and you can save my soul." Jesus replies "Today you will be with me in paradise."

Living with Jesus Christ as my king *is* paradise. I worked as a volleyball referee for a few more months, but I worried a lot less. I worked at summer camp, I went on more hikes, and read more books. And soon my church needed to hire a youth minister, and I got the job.

Have you heard the term "The Jesus Movement" this year? In the Episcopal Church, we consecrated a new Presiding Bishop last year, Bishop Michael Curry. He likes to talk about the Jesus Movement. I looked it up, and he has a few videos online to explain what he is talking about. He says it is like the moment in church where the Gospel is about to be read.

When we read from scripture, we sit and listen, but when we read the Gospel passage, where Jesus' words will be heard, we stop the show. We hold the book high, and bring it down to the people. We stand and sing for the words of Jesus. Wherever we are in the sanctuary, we turn towards the Gospel reader. And there stands a deacon or a priest, who has been ordained to be at the intersection of the church and the world. This is the Jesus movement - singing in celebration, standing in honor and turning our faces towards the Gospel. We re-orient ourselves to Jesus.

That's what it felt like for me in 2011. I turned and looked at Jesus, and He was worth it all. I thought "This is what I want to do. Forever." I had felt what it is like to live in Christ's kingdom, surrounded by all those teenage ministers and adults supporting them, and it felt perfect. With Christ as our king, we were in paradise. I'm not trying to compare myself to Jesus, far from it! I am saying that the life of Christ lives on, and the Kingdom of Christ is real. I was saved by the people around me on that weekend retreat, because they showed me the Kingdom of paradise. Christ's story was their story, and it's the story of all of us who are here today.

It's your story, if you think Jesus is important enough to be here today, and to take goodness out of what we do here together. We are here today saying "OK Jesus, you are the real deal, the Christ." Let us all turn to Jesus too, and let him always be our King. AMEN