

“In Christ Our King”

SERMON TEXT: Malachi 3:13-18; Colossians 1:13-20; and Luke 23:27-43

Dearly beloved of God, whom the Holy Spirit has called to faith through the Gospel: grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for our sins so that He might rescue us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom belongs all glory, honour, and praise forevermore. Amen.

Brothers and sisters, imagine, just imagine if you will, a kingdom ruled by a just and powerful king. Imagine, if you will, that this kingdom was beset by rebels who not only rejected their rightful king’s authority, but had also taken arms against this king, wreaked havoc across his lands, and, dare I add, even sought to turn many of his loyal subjects to join them in their rebellion. Imagine, if you will, what such a king could, should, and would do. According to the ways of the world, he could, should, and would very likely give the order for his army to scour every corner of his realm and put every rebel to the sword. He could, should, and would very likely have those who rebelled against him, and his authority, brought before him before having them executed as an example of his justice. Yet, imagine, if you will, that, instead of justice, he decided to show mercy. Yes, mercy. He could, should, and would very likely, in such an unlikely instance, mercifully stay their execution and have them imprisoned, for the rest of their days, in his castle’s dungeon. Yes, in doing this he would be justified and most merciful. Yet, with all of this still in the realm of our imagination, let us further imagine that, in his mercy, he decided to grant them a full pardon, complete amnesty. Yes, he exercised his mercy to the fullest. Yet, what about justice? After all, isn’t he a *just* king? Indeed. Being a

just king, imagine, if you will, that he then willingly consigned himself to suffer in their stead, imprisoning himself in his castle's dungeon, for the sake of justice. Of course, this is hard to imagine. Yet, imagine, if you will, that he gave his life so as to spare the lives of his disloyal subjects. Of course, this is even harder to imagine! Yet, in doing this he would be most merciful and just—for the law is the law and the demands of justice must be met! Yes, this is surely starting to get very hard to imagine. Yet, what if the king decided that he would not only take their place to set them free, but also set a royal diadem upon each rebellious brow and a signet ring upon each and every hand that was raised against him? What if, in addition to the pardon that would cost him his own life, he graciously gave them the kingdom itself? Yes, in doing so, he would demonstrate the greatest grace and the most mercy while remaining truly just by meeting justice's demands. Yet, as hard as this all could, should, and would be to imagine, we need not merely imagine it because it is not the story of a king in the realm of our imagination, but it is God's promise to the world He so loves—realized in the person and work of the King of kings, Jesus Christ, in the real world!

Beloved in the Lord, in the cross of Christ, God's grace and mercy intersect with God's justice. This bears repeating: in the cross of Christ, God's grace and mercy intersect with God's justice. It was on the cross that Christ Jesus, the king of kings, and Lord of lords, bore the full punishment that justice demanded so as to allow for mercy and grace to be rightly extended. Yes, this too bears repeating: it was on the cross that Jesus bore the full punishment that justice demanded so as to allow for mercy and grace to be rightly extended. It was on the cross, in the stead of a man rightly condemned, between two others who were rightly condemned, with a

crown of thorns upon His head, that the King of kings was hung, shamefully suspended between heaven and earth so as bridge our shame by burying it into His own being: justice intersecting with mercy and grace. By this, through faith in Christ, we who are under the Law, rightly condemned as rebels and deserving the penalty of death, have now been set free, given full amnesty, shown the most mercy. By this, God Himself has acted on our behalf, to spare those would lay down their weapons in repentance and come to fear the LORD. “‘They will be Mine,’ says the LORD of hosts, ‘on the day that I make them My own possession, and I will spare them as a man spares his own son who serves him.’” Indeed, He has made us His own possession, for, as St. Paul attests, “He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” Furthermore, we have been washed clean and cloaked in His Son’s own righteousness, adopted as sons, and counted as the royal heirs of the kingdom of God. All of this took place in Holy Baptism. Yes, Holy Baptism. For, it is written, “In Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” We have been made anew in Christ through Holy Baptism. The Law could not cleanse us of our sin. It could only reveal to us our need for cleansing. So it was used in this way to serve the Jews who had it written on tablets of stone and to serve the Greeks, the Gentiles, who only had the Law written on stoney hearts. This Law continues to reveal our need for cleansing, keeping us in custody until we are brought before God’s Word of promise in Christ, in order that we might be justified by faith. Yes, the Law, which only speaks of justice’s demands, prepares the way for the Gospel, the good news, which tells of grace and mercy. In Holy Baptism, grace

is given and mercy is extended as God's Word washes over us with water, cleansing our conscience, and drowning us to die and rise in Christ. We are united to the Son of God and, by the authority of God's own name, we are reborn as sons of God. Holy Baptism is the gracious work of God that, as we confess in Luther's Small Catechism, "works forgiveness of sins, delivers from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this, as the words and promises of God declare." The catechism continues:

How can water do such great things? It is not the water indeed that does them, but the word of God which is in and with the water, and faith, which trusts such word of God in the water. For without the word of God the water is simple water and no baptism. But with the word of God it is a baptism, that is, a gracious water of life and a washing of regeneration in the Holy Ghost, as St. Paul says in Titus, chapter three, "By the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost, which He shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ, our Saviour, that, being justified by His grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life. This is a faithful saying."

Our Lord, having come into His kingdom, the firstborn from the dead, possessing all power and authority over every throne or dominion unto all eternity, has remembered us for He would never forget us or forsake us. For, as it is written, "In him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of His cross." Holy Baptism unites us to Him for whom, by whom, in whom, and to whom all were created, according to His Word. Holy Baptism is nothing less than the Gospel applied to each and every believer— every rebel to be pardoned and pronounced to be an heir of the kingdom by none other than the King of kings Himself!

Brothers and sisters, having put on Christ by being baptized into Christ, you inherit the kingdom, the promise of Paradise. Your new inheritance is purely given to you by God's mercy and grace because your rightful inheritance as rebels is only ruin, according to justice's demands. Your justification— your right to stand before the King of kings in a right relationship with Him— is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. Yet, your faith is not alone as it clings to its rightful object, the means by which God's grace is imparted, namely, your baptism. Every time you look to the lectern to hear His Word, you see the font and recall that the One by whom and for whom you were made has now made you anew. Every time you make the Sign of the Cross, you recall your baptism, the work of God that united you to His Son and filled you with His Spirit. Every time you pass by the font, as you come to this King's table, to receive Him who receives you, you recall that you have been joined to that body to which Christ is the head, the Church— His Church, before which even the gates of Hell are powerless! The unimaginable has taken place as your place was taken by Christ. As it is written, "When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'" If you will, there is nothing left to imagine when it comes to God's will for your forgiveness, life, and salvation because God has given you His Word in Holy Baptism. The King of kings has announced your amnesty. The Lord of lords has spared your life by laying down His own. Yes, Christ, *our* king, has made *us* His Church. Christ, our king, has claimed us and cleansed us by the outpouring flood of His innocent blood, poured out in love.

Imagine what we would, should, and could be like if we held fast to this truth, remembering by our baptism what it took for us to be forgiven and, given what God has given, who we now are in Christ. Now, just imagine if we shared this good news— this other worldly message which runs counter to the ways of this world and now defines us as it delineates our destiny— with every rebel who has yet to lay down their weapons in surrender before Christ our king. Just imagine what would come to pass as we pass along this unimaginable story to all who would give us a hearing to tell the tale of our king, God’s Christ. Imagine just *that* as we soon come to commemorate the Advent of this king, our King, in the coming season of His Church’s calendar. Just imagine... Amen.

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with all of you. Amen.