

Today is the last Sunday of our church year, which is Christ the King Sunday. This is when we study how Jesus is the King of Kings, Lord of Lords, The Greatest Leader of All Time. Today celebrates all we have learned throughout the Gospel. A major theme in Luke's gospel is that Jesus consistently seeks the lost. In truth, we have all been lost and in need of Christ finding us at one time or another. It is not that we are less than adequate, you are all perfect in Christ's eyes. The truth is that there are moments when we feel inadequate, and this separates us from God.

Luke's recollection of the crucifixion includes parts that come in threes. There are three people on the cross, Jesus and these men are called criminals three times, and people tell Jesus to save himself three times.¹ It is a pattern that Luke is using to show how the one who is our savior is looking for the lost at all times. He is not being forsaken, rather those who are lost are forsaken.

The Gospel of the lost, Luke, notes on the cross of Jesus that says, "This is the King of the Jews." The wording above Jesus is different for various reasons in the Gospels.² It is interesting to note that in Luke, the idea that Jesus is referred to as King of Jews is not only a mocking title, but he actually is also the King of all Kings including those who have lost their way. Such as the men next to him. In this reading from Luke, we see three of the seven words, or phrases, of Christ from the Cross, looking closely at the first, "Father, forgive them: they do not know what they are doing."

Jesus is asking for those crucifying him to realize their wrongdoing and have it forgiven through God's mercy. These soldiers are lost and even if they cannot realize their wrong, Jesus is seeking for these lost sheep to be brought back into the fold of God's loving care. Being crucified between two criminals is fitting because these two men were lost to society and God by their actions. They were seen as outsiders because of the unfortunate choices they made in their life.³

Before our reading begins in Luke 23:27 we see that in addition to the criminals, Jesus is surrounded by another group that is not often taken seriously: the women. These are the ones who are weeping for Jesus and feel his presence.⁴ By consistently showing them grace and giving them a place at the table, Jesus is lifting up those who care. Jesus empathizes with the women and in turn they empathize with him. Perhaps this group felt less lost.

Where Jesus was crucified is close to the church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem. This was just outside the walls of Jerusalem and an interesting point for someone who was seeking to find those who were lost and just outside of society throughout the Gospel of Luke.⁵ This was not unusual for Roman society; it was however illustrative for Luke's Gospel.⁶ The idea of being taken physically outside of the heart of society to die has a bleak symbolism of being cast away.

¹ Edwards, J.R. (2015). *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Gospel According to Luke*. Nottingham: Apollos.

² Hendriksen, W. (1978). *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic. pp.1026- 1033

³ Hendriksen, W. (1978). *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic. pp.1026-1033

⁴ Stone, M. (2020). *Living on the Plain*. New York: Church Publishing

⁵ Hendriksen, W. (1978). *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic. pp.1026-1033

⁶ Edwards, J.R. (2015). *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Gospel According to Luke*. Nottingham: Apollos.

Jesus' death feels very circular. He is crucified on top of where some believe Adam was buried.⁷ With this, there begins a new Eden: one where we know God's love and mercy. Jesus is God incarnate and that incarnation does not leave with Jesus' death, or ascension. We can find this loving kindness in the face of each other when we are kind and forgiving together.

What seems like an ending in Luke's Gospel, Jesus' death, calls us back to much of the beginning. Jesus is surrounded by people, as he was greeted by Simeon and Anna at his dedication at the Temple. Also, the repentant criminal uses the word, "remember." The Virgin Mary uses the same word in her Magnificat.⁸ Jesus always praised mercy, such as the parable where the unjust judge relented and gave mercy, and the father who mercifully accepted his prodigal son and the elder son too, or the Good Shepherd who mercifully seeks the lost sheep. To Luke, remembering to be merciful is key to finding Jesus.

Jesus does not only wish to locate the lost, he wishes to ensure that they find their way to repentance. When he tells the story of the tax collector and the Pharisee, he notes that the one who is repentant is the one who will go home at peace with God. Jesus is saving the lost from the cross. He inspires a criminal and prays for those crucifying him. While not everyone accepts being found, Jesus continues to seek and save the lost. Jesus does this all for love, even if his love is rejected, grace continues to pursue us and prevails over evil.⁹ It is with similar love that we are to search for those who are lost: we are to use grace all the time and in all ways.

What is fascinating about Jesus' intercession is that he is fulfilling a prophecy from Isaiah by praying for those who are wronging him. He does this to show us how we are to seek the lost even when they are on the outside; regardless of how hurt or in grief someone is, Christ is open to searching for them.¹⁰ We are to pray for those who are hurtful to us so that they may find their way back and find peace from God. Jesus wishes to carry our burdens because he can see that they are too heavy for us.¹¹ Instead of looking for difficulty, Jesus is searching for good, it does not matter what someone has done: Jesus wants them in his fold. We can have this gift and share it with others. Jesus was driven by love to die on the cross showing himself dying for the sins of others. This act like a knight in a fairy tale shows true love for all, even when we are so lost that we cannot proclaim Jesus, he stands for us.¹²

Jesus was the woman searching for the lost coin, the father who embraced his son, and is our Good Shepherd. Jesus continues to seek and save us when we are lost. When we feel left out, rejected, in pain, are grieving, or are forgotten, Jesus wants nothing more than to embrace us and bring us home. "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise." Yes, that is the depth of God' saving embrace. May we share the good news that God in Christ came to seek and save the lost. Including us. Amen.

⁷ Stone, M. (2020).. *Living on the Plain*. New York: Church Publishing

⁸ Edwards, J.R. (2015). *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Gospel According to Luke*. Nottingham: Apollos.

⁹ Wright, N.T. (2001). *Luke for Everyone*. London: SPCK.

¹⁰ Luke 1:54 and Edwards, J.R. (2015). *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Gospel According to Luke*. Nottingham: Apollos.

¹¹ Stone, M. (2020).. *Living on the Plain*. New York: Church Publishing

¹² Hendriksen, W. (1978). *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic. pp.1026- 1033