

Lectionary Gospel Commentaries

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Based on the Lectionary Pericope Covering:

Luke 23:27-43

SOLA-LSB (Lutheran Service Book): Year C - Proper 29 (Christ the King Sun), Text: Lk. 23:27-43
RCL (Revised Common Lectionary): Year C - Proper 29 (Christ the King Sun), Text: Lk. 23:33-43

The insights offered below deal with a bigger picture than that contained in the limited pericope selection for Christ the King Sunday. However, they offer insights into the narrative that leads up to Jesus' crucifixion — or better, coronation. It was in the cross we see that Christ is proclaimed as King.

The Context: Luke's Passion Narrative

The chief priests and scribes seek ways to have Jesus put to death (v. 21:1–2). Judas offers to work with them to devise a plan whereby he will hand Jesus over to them — for a price (v. 21:3–6).

Jesus sends Peter and John to make arrangements for the use of a guest room in which Jesus and the disciples might celebrate the coming Passover (v. 22:7–13). Note that the Greek word used for “guest room” is the same as that used in the Christmas story (*kataluma*), where reference is made to there being no room in the “guest room” — not “inn” (v. 2:7).

While Jesus celebrates the Passover meal with His disciples, He inaugurates His Holy Supper (v. 22:14–20). He also foretells His coming betrayal (v. 22:21–23). When the disciples argue among themselves concerning who will be the greatest in Jesus' coming Kingdom, Jesus has to do some corrective teaching (v. 22:24–30). He predicts Peter's coming denial of his Lord (v. 22:31–34) and tells the disciples what material supplies they are to take with them when they undertake their coming ministry (v. 22:35–38).

Jesus then takes the disciples to the Mount of Olives (no mention is made of the Garden of Gethsemane), where He prays and endures great agony — even to the point of sweating blood (v. 22:39–46).

Judas leads a crowd to Jesus to capture Him. Judas kisses Jesus in the process. When one of His disciples cuts off an ear from one of Jesus' captors, Jesus immediately heals the man and insists, “Disciples — no violence!” (v. 22:47–53).

Luke describes Peter's three-fold denial of his Lord (v. 22:54–62), after which Jesus is ridiculed and beaten by His captors (22:63–65).

The Trial Scenes

While the reference to Jesus' Kingship is most explicit in John's Passion narrative, especially in his conversation with Pontius Pilate, it is central to Luke's account as well.

- Jesus is tried by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes (Luke 22:66–71). The Jewish leaders take Him to Pilate (Luke 23:1–5), since they want him sentenced to death. They know that the Romans would only do that if a political accusation was made.
- At first, Pilate is not impressed. He does not see Jesus as a political or military threat. Despite the charges made by the Jewish leaders, Pilate states, “Not guilty!”
- Pilate sends Jesus to Herod Antipas (Luke 23:6–11), who himself used the title of “king.” However, Jesus refuses to answer any of Herod's questions. Again, Jesus is subjected to mockery and abuse. Herod sends Jesus back to Pilate, and Herod and Pilate become friends!
- Although Pilate again insists that he finds nothing in Jesus to support the charges being leveled against Him by the Jewish leaders, he does worry that the crowd in Jerusalem for the Passover could erupt in a riot. So he eventually releases the criminal Barabbas to appease the crowds and hands Jesus over for crucifixion (Luke 23:13–25).
- Those leading Jesus to the place of execution order Simon of Cyrene to carry Jesus' cross — most likely, the cross beam only (v. 23:26).

This is where the pericope assigned for Christ the King Sunday picks up.

Commentary on Luke 23:27-43

Verses 23:27-31: Along the way to the cross, Jesus addresses the weeping and wailing women of Jerusalem and points to the fate that will eventually overtake those living in Jerusalem.

Verse 23:32-33: Jesus is nailed to His cross between two criminals, likely being put to death for political rebellion, like Jesus was accused of.

Verses 23:34-35: In Luke, the first thing Jesus says from the cross is this: “Father, forgive them; they know not what they do” — in reference to the crucifixion itself, but also to the underlying rejection of who Jesus was.

Verses 23:36-38: The term “King of the Jews” surfaces in verse 37, where the soldiers mockingly refer to Jesus as “the King of the Jews.” Verse 38 refers to an inscription being fastened to the cross above Jesus’ head (again, mockingly) that declared Jesus to be the King of the Jews.

Verses 23:39-43: Where the other Gospels mention Jesus being scoffed at by them both, only in Luke do we hear the actual words spoken by the two criminals on the cross. Here, reference is made again to Jesus as the Messiah and specifically to his Kingdom. When one of the two thieves crucified beside Jesus throws a challenge at Him (v. 39), the other responds in repentance and supplication, saying, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” To this, Jesus replies, “I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43).

Notice that strictly speaking, Jesus does not say “you will be with me in heaven.” In Scripture, *paradise* is not a synonym for *heaven* (the throne-room of God), but rather a reference to the blessed place of the dead, referred to more metaphorically in Luke 16:22 as the “bosom of Abraham” where the saints rest in peace.

Unfortunately, too many people hope for a future eternal life in a “heaven” without any reference to Christ at all. Many even ask, “Does a person need to believe in Jesus to get into heaven?” This is a fundamental misunderstanding of our Christian hope.

In a biblical understanding the Kingdom of God, the emphasis is not on the place, but on the lordship of Christ and his presence with us. The promise is that we will be with him forever, under his graceful rule. To be with Jesus, in time or eternity, is in itself what it means to be in paradise!

The Following Verses

The pericope ends prior to verses 23:44, where Jesus prays, “Father, into Your hands I commend My spirit” (Luke 23:46). As in Mark and Matthew, darkness spreads across the land from midday until 3:00 in the afternoon (Luke 23:44-45). The veil of the Temple is torn down the middle (v. 23:45b). The Roman centurion declares Jesus to be innocent (v. 23:47). People grieve deeply (v. 23:48).

However, some of Jesus’ friends and some women who have followed Him from Galilee to Jerusalem watch what is taking place (Luke 23:49).

Joseph of Arimathea obtains permission from Pilate to remove Jesus’ body from the cross and provides Him with decent burial in a new tomb (Luke 23:50–53).

The women from Galilee watch these proceedings and then return home to prepare the needed spices and oils to embalm Jesus’ body after the Sabbath is over (Luke 23:55–56).