

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable to you oh God, my strength and my joy... Amen

We started out our worship this morning by blessing the chaos. By harkening back to all that has happened in the past church year.

We acknowledged pain, hurt, and loss... And we acknowledged joy, life, and love.

Because that is what we do together. We journey together, like birds migrating together.

We come together in word, song, prayer, and at Christ's table.

Because we are a community of faith. And faith, as I mentioned last week, is more than a space... Because faith lives in each of you...

But the only way to make this possible, was because of the great sacrifice that we heard today... in a very unsettling gospel...

A gospel that I'm guessing many of us would rather not think about on a daily basis.

As thinking about Jesus' journey to the place called The Skull is very unsettling...

In this place Jesus was mocked, offered sour wine, and then crucified...

And yet, this is the scripture that was specifically chosen for Christ the King Sunday.

A passage that doesn't portray what many people would think of as a king... But, instead, is a passage that mocks Jesus as The King of the Jews.

But as so often happens with Scripture, what we expect to happen doesn't happen... And when we think we know what a passage was getting at... We are shown a different way by the Holy Spirit...

Because God is always unveiling things to us in new and different ways...

Because the Word of God is alive, and it is relevant to our lives today.

And sometimes, to understand what that relevance is, we need to go back to Scripture. To dig around in what was living and breathing in those pages that were written so many years ago.

Which, if we are looking at the gospel, usually involves, well, Jesus.

And the gospels are jam packed with stories of Jesus healing the sick, forgiving the sins of others, and caring for the poor and the oppressed...

We see Jesus as a prophet in word and deed... Who shared God's love for all of creation... And who taught us valuable lessons, such as to do unto others as you would have them do unto you...

Such a selfless and love filled life, seeking out others, showing kindness, forgiveness, and grace...

And this is the way that his life ends... Instead of him being lifted up, loved, and shown some grace...

Jesus was betrayed by those who were closest to him.

He was mocked, laughed at, yelled at, and rebuked.

And in these final moments of humiliation, hatred and immanent death, what did Christ do?

Well, if we go back to the passage from today, we see that all the way through and through, his response was always forgiveness.

"Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing."

Because forgiveness was one of the reasons that Christ became flesh.

Which rings true to the very end of the passage today, where Jesus says to a convicted criminal, "Truly I tell you. Today you will be with me in paradise."

... Now that is radical forgiveness...

Forgiveness that is so far out of my comprehension, that I can't even grasp what happened there...

And even though I cannot grasp the total and complete forgiveness of God. Even though I cannot grasp all that God has done for God's creation and God's kingdom...

I can tell you one thing that is for certain... That this is a kingdom I want to live in...

Because God's kingdom, as demonstrated through the life, death, and the resurrected Christ, is a kingdom that truly embraces radical forgiveness, unceasing grace, and the love of God that surpasses all understanding.

Because the kingdom of God is a different kind of kingdom altogether...

And just like the gospel was turned on its head today, challenging what our view of a king is... The kingdom of God continues to surprise and delight us in unexpected ways.

As the kingdom of God is not like any earthly kingdom. There are no elections or politics involved.

Because the kingdom of God was not created for a king to simply reign.

The kingdom of God was created for you to be embraced in God's radical love.

Showing us that the kingdom of God was created because God chose you to be a part of it.

You were created to be an integral part of God's kingdom.

And the most beautiful part of this kingdom is that God has chosen all of you, and many, many more people. Showing us that together we can embrace the kingdom of God, now, on earth.

Together we can show forgiveness, grace, and love to others...

Which is what we prepare for, together, every single Sunday...

All are invited to gather at the table, and to hear the Words of Christ... This is my body given for you, do this in remembrance of me... This is my blood shed for you, for the forgiveness of sins, do this in remembrance of me.

Bringing a moment from over 2000 years ago, across time and across space, for you...

So that you can know without a doubt that you are forgiven...

Forgiveness that becomes your invitation into Paradise...

The kind of forgiveness, that provides hope.

So that that when life becomes difficult, exhausting, or seems downright impossible...

You can remember the hope found in Christ.

Hope that Christ provided in the worst moments of his life, to a stranger and a criminal.

Hope that is radical enough to cross time and space and become a part of your being...

Opening in you a glimmer, a shimmer, or even a sliver, of hope in the storm.

So, if this morning, when you looked back over the past year and discovered your own feelings of unsettledness, if you found your life to be filled more with chaos, loss, and heaviness...

Know that, in Christ, a new year always awaits...

And while that final new year may be years and years off.

Sometimes the church new year, simply lies here, with one another...

Because the start of the church year ushers in the greatest hope of all...

The waiting, watching, and preparing...for the birth of Christ.

The night that birthed everlasting life and hope into the darkness...

A holy darkness, that allowed for the star to shine... To guide the journey of all who wandered, waited, and watched.

Because what was birthed on that night, was the kingdom of God, a place where all are welcomed, forgiven, and provided with the promise of Paradise... Amen.