

*"Do You See What I See?"*

Christ the King Sunday  
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November 21, 2004  
Trinity Lutheran Church

Jeremiah 23:1-6; Psalm 46;  
Colossians 1:11-20; Luke 23:33-43

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God the Father, and Our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

"Why" began the old TV commercial, "why are you putting AI Steak Sauce on your hamburger?" Do you remember the somewhat indignant reply?

"This isn't hamburger! It's ground steak!"

This isn't any old sauce. It's AI Steak Sauce. And the hamburger wasn't just any old hamburger, it was steak – admittedly, it was ground – but it was steak. It all depends on how you look at it, doesn't it?

Perhaps perception isn't reality after all. This particular account in Luke's Gospel is full of things seen and things unseen; of perceptions that seemingly indicate one thing, when reality indicates quite the other.

Part of the clothing that Jesus wore was just that. A "regal robe" it's called earlier in the Gospel, a robe worn by royalty, by governors, by the rich and the powerful. It was a robe the soldiers gave to Jesus to mock what was to them and to their superiors, the nonsensical proposition that He was the King of the Jews. In the eyes of the soldiers, in the eyes of the official witnesses, in the eyes of the leaders present, he's nothing more nor less than a common politically-criminal prisoner, worse than Barabas the insurrectionist, whom Pilate released simply to suit the whim of the mob.

And in some eyes, yes even in some eyes even today, Jesus is seen not as the King of the Jews, not as the ruler of creation, but as an inspiring philosopher, or a great teacher, or an interesting historical personage. The question is, is that all that Jesus is? Or should we be a lot more attentive to what Luke is saying in this text?

Paying some attention to this simple bottle of AI Sauce might be instructive. This isn't just any old sauce, as I said before, it's a special sauce and it's quite uncommon, in that it has a royal pedigree. The sauce was initially concocted for the dining pleasure of King George IV of England. The King's chef was constantly finding new ways to delight and impress the royal palate, and he scored big time when he developed this sauce for the king. The king was so impressed he called it "AI sauce".

No, he didn't coin the title, he borrowed it from a famous British maritime insurance firm, Lloyds of London (or so the story goes). Lloyds used an alphabetical classification system to rate the seaworthiness and risk involved when insuring ships. AI was the classification assigned to the most seaworthy of ships, which were at the least risk of being lost at sea. So it was, smacking his lips, that George IV named the wonderful sauce his chef had developed AI Sauce, a sauce fit for a king. (And no, they're not paying me for this illustration.)

So it was with the regal robe, a special robe, a robe, as we've seen, associated with royalty, with which the soldiers dressed Jesus in order to mock his so-called royal status. How ironic their mockery, for it is in actuality, an acclamation of Jesus' real status. And what the soldiers perceived as reality was not reality at all. If anything, they're egged on by the mock proclamation attached to the cross above Jesus' head; it reads "This is the king of the Jews". Again intended to mock and humiliate, in reality it becomes an acclamation of the real identity of the crucified one beneath it.

How ridiculous, it seemed to the people at the time, to the leaders and the soldiers. How ridiculous – this beaten, bedraggled, thorn-crowned Galilean malcontent – how less like a king could one be? How less like the son of God Almighty? Why, the whole thing was laughable. Just so, the leaders of the people failed to perceive the real identity of the One being crucified before them.

The leaders, those in position of religious and political authority, the very people one would expect to realize who and what Jesus was, join in the mockery. And they're joined by one of the criminals. All of their cries meant to mock Jesus, actually mock God Himself and proclaim the crucified One's real identity: "If you're the king of the Jews" they yell, "if you're the messiah, save yourself!"

Do you notice what's happening? In their voices, in their mockery, in their taunting, the one who tempted and tried Jesus, so long ago in the wilderness, has returned. The one who has lurked in the shadows of time has now found the right time, the opportune time of which he warned earlier. This is the one who promised Jesus the rulership of the earth. This is the one who called for his allegiance. This is the one attempted to seduce Jesus into saving himself and that one, in the voices of the leaders and the soldiers, has returned with one last, one terrible, one great temptation: to come down from the cross, to end the mockery and the pain and the prospect of his own death, and so serve himself, and betray God.

But Jesus refuses. It's precisely because he is the King – the king of the Jews, the king of the gentiles, our King – it's precisely because of that, that he will not save himself, but give His life under those circumstances, degrading and dreadful, for us all.

One last time, one final time, Jesus asserts who He is. Not by quoting the word of God, but living as the Word of God. By faithfulness and not by power. By submission and not by independence. By making peace and not by making war. Here is the resounding echo of his prayer in the garden of Gethsemane, "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done."

So the soldiers, the leaders, and the criminal, have failed to see what might have been seen. And with incredible irony, their mockery actually proclaims the truth.

But there is more yet to be seen in this account of Luke. Have you noticed? The crowd has remained silent through it all. They watch as the soldiers gamble for Jesus' clothes, the clothes that a hemorrhaging woman desperately reached out to touch and found herself healed in so doing. The crowd says nothing, but they watch, they learn, they inwardly digest.

And with them, the other criminal begins to see the enormity of the truth being revealed before him. A lowly, common criminal, justly executed for the way he lived his life. He offers no plea of innocence. He makes no claim of being falsely accused. But he recognizes his guilt and the

justice of his punishment, and at the same time the innocence of Jesus and the injustice he suffered. He castigates his fellow prisoner for failing to see what's there in plain view for all to see. He turns to Jesus with a simple, poignant request, there's nothing left that he can do as he hangs on the cross, dying in execution, but he makes the poignant plea, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

Do you see? Do you see how Luke is writing this account that we might understand how it is where and when God comes to us? Not with power and force and oppression, but in weakness, with great gentleness and enormous compassion. So God sends us our King, Christ our King. The King who invites us into a new way of living and seeing the world, and active and unimaginably difficult way of living. To live our lives in humility and service, service of Him and service to one another and service to the stranger and the enemy.

This royal living is the exact opposite of the royal living we know in our world today. It's a way of being that calls us to look beyond the everyday perceptions, to see behind ordinary events, that we might discern God revealing Himself in our very midst. It's something like seeing behind this bottle of AI Sauce (you thought I wouldn't get back to it, didn't you?).

You see, after King George IV died, his chef was inundated with requests from many of the people who had tasted the sauce at royal banquets. Now that the king was gone, maybe they could have a chance at getting the recipe. The chef, however, being quite the entrepreneur, a Georgian Emeril you might say, sold the recipe to a company based in Connecticut. Subsequently, that company was bought by Nabisco and yes, when you put this sauce on your ground steak, you're using the self-same sauce that was brought into being for the pleasure of George IV.

So the question becomes, what do we see? Where are we in our vision, in our sight, in our seeing, in our perception? Do we see Christ the King in Jesus of Nazareth? Do our lives proclaim that we're following in the footsteps of our King? Or have we all but unintentionally allowed our lives and the way we live to mock Him, whose subjects we hope we are? Or can we like the criminal, recognize our own sinfulness, and recognize in Christ who and what he really is?

The remarkable thing in this account of Luke is that Jesus responds to this oh so perceptive criminal, that on that day, he, that one, that criminal, will be with Jesus in paradise. And so it is that one, and only one man, was saved, and he a criminal, that no one need despair, and that no one might presume.

You see, gaining our salvation is more a matter of seeing ourselves and our lives as they really are, and accepting the gift of forgiveness and life so freely given to us in the costly suffering and death of Jesus, and following Him every step of the way as our Lord and our King. And therein lies our salvation. Not that through the things we do, we save ourselves, but that in following Him who is our King, the Son of God, the Messiah, the Christ, we are led to our salvation and known before the throne of God.

Do you see?

Amen.