

“Are you not the Messiah?”

1. The World Cup is here

- a. If you don't know what I'm talking about, ask any high school soccer player, or any ex-pat living in Columbus.
- b. It's soccer's world tournament final where national teams compete every 4 years.
- c. The United States has a team in it, and so does Mexico, though in different parts of the bracket.
- d. Usually, it takes place in the summer, but this year, for the first time, it is being hosted by a Middle East country, Qatar, which would have meant that in their summer the soccer ball would have probably melted on the field
- e. So, they have moved the tournament to November and December, in fact, the first game will be played today at 11am our time between the host Qatar and Ecuador.
- f. Having grown up in Mexico, I've always followed the World Cup
- g. In fact, my hometown of Monterrey got to be one of the venues for matches when I was growing up, and though I wasn't able to attend, one of my brothers was at the game when Mexico lost to West Germany in penalty kicks, in the 1986 quarter finals, the farthest we've gone in the tournament. Gosh, it still hurts.
- h. If the Olympics and the Super Bowl had a baby, it would be the World Cup
- i. National pride is on the line
- j. Any country with a national team can participate.
 - i. How is that you ask?
 - ii. The 32 teams who are in the tournament right now had to qualify from regional competitions over the past year or so.
 - iii. That's why this is known as the World Cup Finals.
- k. As you can tell, I get excited about this.
 - i. I want to (but promise I won't) watch every match.

- ii. I once got up at 3 in the morning to watch Mexico play in South Korea's WC
 - l. There is the drama of group play to qualify to the knockout stage
 - m. Then of course, it's single elimination. Win and keep playing. Lose and go home.
 - i. You want your team to go as far as they can.
 - ii. You dream of them beating the favorites
 - iii. You dream of them lifting high the trophy
 - iv. But you know it's likely not going to happen. But you still hope.
- 2. In a culture of winners and losers, the people of God expected, well, a winner.
 - a. It may seem odd, then, that the passage for today, Reign of Christ Sunday or Christ the King Sunday, has Jesus crucified.
 - b. How is it that we would mark Jesus as King by showing him in what to all the world would seem to be his lowest / losing moment?
 - c. The people who followed Jesus in ancient Palestine were enthralled by Jesus
 - d. He taught like no other rabbi, healed like no other doctor, and stood up to the authorities in a way that was shocking and refreshing
 - e. And so we wouldn't be surprised that Jesus was creating quite a stir, and those on Team Jesus thought this would be the Messiah, the chosen one from God, who would FINALLY kick the Romans out, and reestablish the Monarchy of King David.
 - f. As you know, Jesus didn't embrace the people's interpretation of Messiah
 - g. He frustrated some of his followers by not unseating the powerful
 - h. He wasn't trying to build power coalitions, but instead spent time with people pushed to the margins
 - i. And when he was finally arrested (because he was very much perceived as a political threat) he didn't put up a fight or call for the masses to rise up.
 - j. And when he was crucified, people openly mocked him, using the title of Messiah
 - i. Aren't you the Messiah and here you are dying?
 - ii. Aren't you the King? Save yourself!

iii. Professor Debra Mumford from Louisville Presbyterian Seminary writes:

1. *First of all, Roman crucifixion was only perpetrated on people of the lower classes and who were not Roman citizens. People of the higher classes were not treated as severely and certainly not reprimanded or punished publicly. If Jesus was true royalty, he would not have been crucified on a cross.*
2. *Secondly, even if Jesus somehow ended up on a cross, as a person with authority in those days, He would have had the power and influence to secure his own deliverance. So, they likely mocked Jesus because it was obvious to them that Jesus could not have been the person some claimed him to be.*

<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revision-d-common-lectionary/christ-the-king-3/commentary-on-luke-2333-43-5>

k. Instead Jesus spoke words of forgiveness and of hope from the cross.

l. And he died. He lost.

m. Or so it seemed to everyone that Friday afternoon.

n. Call it a “come from behind” win when on Easter Sunday we get to see what Messiah and King really mean

i. He reminded his disciples of all he had taught. That in the Realm of God:

1. the poor receive good news
2. the captives are released
3. the blind recover their sight
4. the oppressed go free
5. and the year of the Lord’s favor/forgiveness is proclaimed

ii. That’s the Messiah he was. That’s the King he was.

1. A forgiving and merciful Ruler
2. A Messiah who upends injustice into God’s justice
3. A leader willing to suffer with the people oppressed by tyrants

- o. That's a very different kind of Ruler in that culture and in any culture.
- 3. As Christians in today's world, it is difficult to take into account the prevailing culture and then seek to recalibrate the notion of winning, of what reigning means, to make it match the perspective Jesus taught. And so we keep following Jesus example as difficult as it is.
 - a. The Reign of Christ is about courage, not about being passive or a doormat
 - i. But Jesus was basically quiet when they crucified him?
 - ii. Yes, but in a way that gutted any moral high ground the authorities thought they had
 - 1. That is, his active, non-violent resistance laid bare the cruelty, and injustice he was suffering.
 - 2. Think of the non-violent resistance direct action by people in the South trying to desegregate lunch counters, for example
 - iii. Jesus also showed courage by going where others wouldn't dare
 - 1. Into the homes of people deemed unclean/sinful/weak
 - 2. Jesus showed solidarity by doing this; he wasn't trying to grow his power or influence
 - b. The Reign of Christ is about power that lifts up, not power that oppresses
 - i. Jesus used his power to heal, to reconcile, to overcome barriers
 - 1. Jesus wanted people to be reconnected to God. Period.
 - 2. He taught to show people God's perspective, very much as a prophet
 - 3. But he also healed and cared for those in need, very much as a shepherd – which is the symbol of leadership approved by God
 - 4. He broke down the walls that separated rich from poor, unclean from clean, men from women, children from adults, insiders from outsiders
 - c. The Reign of Christ is about a flat society, not a hierarchy

- i. Jesus challenged those who lord it over people, and called his followers friends, and invited the person crucified next to him to paradise
 1. Jesus taught the disciples that to lead one has to be a servant
 2. Jesus “left the throne” and became one of us so as to reach us
 3. He didn’t leave behind a structure of power, but instead a community of equals (never mind the mess we’ve made of that since then)
4. Aren’t you the Messiah? Asked the crucified man next to Jesus. I think his question was more like this: What kind of Messiah are you? I’m glad you ask, Jesus seems to reply: the kind who doesn’t abuse their position, the kind who uses power to lift others, the kind unafraid to suffer injustice in order to fight it, the kind who redefines what a Messiah is about.

Reflection questions :

1. Share a story of when felt God working in your life.
2. Why is the crucifixion (Luke 23:33-43) the passage we get today to talk about the Reign of Christ?
3. What is one instance when the human notion of power and might differs from God’s notion, and how does that impact your faith?

Sources: <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revise-common-lectionary/christ-the-king-3/commentary-on-luke-2333-43-5>