

St. Matthew's Lutheran Church—Oconomowoc, WI  
Christ the King Sunday/4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of End Time  
Year A  
Matthew 27:27-31  
November 22, 2020

**SERMON: Matthew 27:27-31**  
**“Lord, Keep Us Joyful in Christ Our King because He Is a King Unlike Any Other”**

October 21, 2016 two high school football teams were taking the field under the Friday night lights in a place called New Lothrop, Michigan, which is just outside of Flint. It had the classic feel of a great Friday night showdown similar to what was happening under the bright lights in small towns dotted across our country. The teams didn't appear to be evenly matched. New Lothrop was a team that was known as a perennial powerhouse football program. While most teams had long hung up the cleats and traded them in for the basketball shoes of basketball season each season New Lothrop was making long playoff runs well into November. This particular team had two players, a quarterback and wide receiver, that were getting recruited heavily by Division 1 college programs, and it wasn't small time college programs it was Big Ten and Big XII schools that were rolling out the red carpet of recruiting. Each of their linemen were tipping the scales around 300 pounds. New Lothrop had quite the list of accomplishments to show for their program. They had a winning streak of 61 games during the regular season which meant the last time they had lost a regular season game was 2009. If you aren't a football fan, I can tell you that is very good. It really didn't matter who they played, New Lothrop was expected to win because they had done it 61 times before so why would the 62<sup>nd</sup> game, the 2016 regular season finale be any different? The other team that was taking the field that night that everyone expected would be New Lothrop's 62<sup>nd</sup> victim was a little school from Saginaw called Michigan Lutheran Seminary. The first time any of their players strapped on shoulder pads was three years earlier as freshman. It was a team that had success come and go and was having a good season themselves, but nothing close to the success of New Lothrop. Many of Michigan Lutheran Seminary's supporters thought to themselves going into the game, “Just play your best and play a good game and that's all you can ask for.” Translation: we don't expect you to win the game, but if you give it your best effort you can be proud of that. Perhaps the feelings heading into that game were best summed up by a local sports reporter that covered high school football. He commented off the record to the head coach of Michigan Lutheran Seminary, “Are you guys crazy scheduling New Lothrop?” So, was MLS crazy? Given what you know right now, pick the winner. Who is going to come out victorious in that game? Are you going to pick New Lothrop that was bigger, has better athletes, and knows how to win because they have done it 61 times in a row? Or are you going to pick MLS, oh and by the way was playing with their backup quarterback because their starting quarterback broke his arm on the third play of the season.

You look at the surface information and you make a conclusion. When it comes to the football game you more than likely will choose New Lothrop to win that game and you wouldn't be alone, everyone else picked them too. We are told, “Don't judge a book by its cover.” But, often we do. We do it when we pick you is going to win or lose a football game. We do it when you go out to eat on a Friday night during non-covid times. If you step through the door of a restaurant and a musty smell invades your nostrils, it looks like the carpet hasn't been vacuumed in two weeks, and it takes 5 minutes before anyone greets you at the door to seat you at a table and you are asked, “Would you come back and eat at this restaurant again?” “Nope.”

What do we see on the surface today? This is the last Sunday of the church year and our focus is Christ the King. We want to see him sitting on his throne and ruling over all. Paul told us in our lesson from 1 Corinthians 15 how Christ rose victorious from the dead and we say, “Yeah! He has conquered our enemies and reign with all of your power Lord!” Then there is the Gospel Lesson today that makes us say, “Huh?” This is Christ the King Sunday is it not? Christ the King Sunday should be about joy, ruling, conquering, and power. You want what is expected of a king. You want the sights and sounds of a king. What do we want in our king? I think an extremely low bar expectation of a king is simply this: you should be able to pick them out in a crowd. The sights and sounds should tell you, “Here is someone really important. Here is a king.” Take your memory back to May of 2018. It was the royal wedding of Prince Harry and Meghan Markle. There was news coverage 24/7 leading up to the wedding. There were dresses chosen and tailored specifically for the event and who could forget the hats. There was glitz and glamor everywhere you saw camera flashes popping. There was no mistaking what was going on. This was all for a prince that really has no political authority or ruling power. You know power when you see it. You know authority when you see it. People pay attention to it.

We want to see a king today. We want to see him paraded out there for everyone to see. We want to see him waving to the crowd. We want to see his authority on display with the soldiers ready at his command. Today we see a gathering of soldiers. We see a large group gathered and milling around to see what was going on. They have given their

attention to someone. It's Jesus at the center of all of this. However, we don't need to get too deep into the lesson to figure out something is very wrong. The people haven't gathered to adore him. They haven't come to chant, "Long live the king!" They haven't gathered to pledge their devotion to him. Something else is going on here. There are soldiers gathered, but instead of protecting they humiliate. They stripped Jesus of his clothing and then draped a scarlet robe over his shoulders. Unfortunately, they were just getting started. While they mockingly dressed Jesus like a king, others were busy weaving together a crown for this king. This so-called crown was placed on Jesus' head as the thorns dug in and a staff was put in his right hand, the hand of power and authority. Those are the sights. Now listen to the sounds as they knelt in front of him shouting, "*Hail, king of the Jews.*" Listen to the laughter and mockery as they strike Jesus over the head with the staff. Finally, when they had their fill of fun, they led him away to be crucified—to die a criminal's humiliating death.

You and I look at this scene today and we have to ask, "Where is our king?" Where is the power, authority, the followers? Where is the glitz and glamor that we want to see not only then, but that we want God to do in our lives? Maybe the deeper question for us to wrestle with brothers and sisters isn't, "Where is our king?" but it's, "What kind of king do we want?" Do we want a king that is mocked and spit on? Do we want the one that wears a crown glistening with blood instead of rubies, instead of a scepter of power he holds a staff of ridicule, instead of royal robes he's given a garment to mock? Then there is the throne. The throne is the seat of power and this king is exalted on a wooden cross designed for torture and death. Do you want this king? Want to judge this book by its cover? Is this the kind of king you want, or do you want one that displays a bit more power, that when we point to him people can see his power and authority and maybe he'll show that power and authority in my life once in a while too, because let's be honest, that would be pretty nice too.

As we ponder that question today of what kind of king do we want let's ask another question, "What kind of king sacrifices himself for his people?" Common sense tells you that precautions are taken to protect the king at all costs. In ancient times the king would be on the battlefield, but well behind the front lines, far away from the threat of enemies. What kind of king marches to the front lines of the battle and fights against the strongest enemies for his people? Our King! Our King fought on the front line against sin, death, and hell. Our King was led like a lamb to the slaughter as Isaiah describes it. Why did he do it? It was the only way you and I are saved. Our King went to battle for us. That's how much he loves us. He could have stopped it. He could have called down his angels with flaming swords and revealed his power to the soldiers that mocked him and led him to the cross. He could have done that, but the cost would have been losing you and me, and he wasn't going to pay that cost. So, instead he paid the cost for you to be his.

On the outside a little football team from Saginaw, Michigan doesn't have a chance to beat a team with a 61-game win streak, but against all odds and to everyone's surprise they did and won 24-20 handing New Lothrop their first regular season loss since 2009. You stare at the scene Matthew describes for us in the Gospel Lesson and many would look at that and say, "No thanks, I want a better king." But he's a King that laid down his life for all mankind so that we can be brought into his kingdom. There isn't a better king than that. Amen.