

In the church calendar today is the end of the Christian year. You might see it to be an opportunity like New Year's Eve when we could have a big party before everything gets a little simpler next Sunday during the season of Advent. After the opening words of the BCP Collect today is traditionally called "stir up Sunday." It is a prayer that asks God to stir up our wills that we might do good works. From the readings appointed for today it is known as the Feast of the Reign of Christ.

It is curious that at the end of the year, after we have heard the birth, death, resurrection, and ascension narratives; after Pentecost and the long season that ensues with Jesus' parables and great deeds of power, we end the entire year outside the

city walls at "the place that is called The Skull." It is a place of desolation, alienation and darkness. It is a



place of derision, mocking, scoffing. It is a place of condemnation and violence. While the violence is understated it is understood to be a common occurrence. The text merely states, "they crucified him there." That is all that is needed to be said. It is not over indulgent.

It is the dialogue that is most intriguing: the soldiers to one another; the soldiers and one of the criminals to Jesus; and the criminals to each other. All of these people are either agents of the empire or opponents and victims of the empire. Their dialogue is an attempt to undermine the status of Jesus' claim to be the Messiah, to be God, to be the anointed one who is now exposed to be powerless, condemned and publicly shamed. Out of fear, Jesus' followers and friends have either fled to safety or are keeping themselves at a safe distance.

In all of this, it is the criminal's self awareness that is most compelling. "We are getting what we deserve," he says, "but this man has done nothing wrong." And then he looks at Jesus and says, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." It is a declaration of belief that Jesus is the suffering servant, the innocent lamb being

offered as a sacrifice, and a king who uniquely has the authority to open and shut the gates in a kingdom that belongs to him. The final words that Jesus offers are a promise: “Today you will be with me in Paradise.”

It is a criminal who becomes the first to enter the kingdom of Jesus; as if to suggest that this is kingdom like no other. It is a kingdom of the condemned, who are now forgiven. It is a kingdom of the oppressed, who are now free. It is a kingdom of the blind, who now see. It is a kingdom of the lost, who are now found. It is a kingdom of the dead, who are now alive.

This should be no surprise, because this is what Jesus has been doing for people wherever he went. Right from the beginning he was proclaiming the year of the Lord’s favour: which was he said, that the blind will receive their sight, the lame will walk, the lepers will be cleansed, and the oppressed will go free.

It is in these acts that the Lord’s favour will be established, and it is in this act of the crucifixion that Jesus, as the powerless one, will turn the tables like he turned the tables of the money

changers outside of the temple, and he will overcome and dissolve all of the powers of death and hell, and bring light in the midst of the darkness.

It is uniquely in this act of utter powerlessness, that Jesus, as God, is able to come alongside the condemned criminal and overthrow the power of their oppressor. It is a loosing of the bonds; a freedom from the chains of condemnation; an undoing of the shackles of death. This is the event, the culmination of all the work of the incarnation, all the movement of the exodus from Egypt, all the wandering in the wilderness to arrive at the promised land to a kingdom which will be established in the place that is called The Skull.

At the end of the year, before we begin the cycle all over again, our wills are stirred as we are reminded of the reign of Christ the king who has established a kingdom like no other. So that even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I shall fear no evil, for you are with me to lead me, guide me, and show me the way to life.