**John 19:2-5** March 29, 2017

Pastor P. Martin **Faith Lutheran Church, Radcliff, KY** 5th Mid-Week Lenten Service

*John 19:2 The soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head. They clothed him in a purple robe 3and went up to him again and again, saying, “Hail, king of the Jews!” And they struck him in the face. 4Once more Pilate came out and said to the Jews, “Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no basis for a charge against him.” 5When Jesus came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe, Pilate said to them, “Here is the man!”*

Dear Friends in Christ,

**“Behold! Your King!”**

Dear Worshippers of Our Savior,

When Pastor Gawel proposed this sermon series, I kind of liked it. “Accidental Sermons”: it catches your interest. It makes you wonder. And the concept behind it is kind of neat too: that Jesus’ enemies were speaking truth to Jesus, even if they didn’t mean to, or want to.

But the more I study these texts, the more difficult it gets. Don’t get me wrong. It’s not that I don’t like this series. It’s just a little more difficult than I thought it would be. It’s difficult because in most of these readings the words we study were most definitely meant to mock Jesus or to oppose Jesus. And the only way we can get anything meaningful out of what they say is to take their words in a way they obviously did not mean. And that is tough. As a pastor, I like to preach on what the Word of God says, not what it doesn’t. So taking words in the opposite way from how they were meant – well, it kind of rubs the wrong way for a preacher. Yet without spending much time on Biblical examples, God himself sometimes did this. He took rebellious people at their word even though they really didn’t know what they were talking about. (Ex: Israelites on the Exodus)

That’s what we have tonight. Some say, “Hail, King of the Jews!” But that is the last thing they mean. Crowning him with thorns, slapping his face, scourging him all plainly tell us that the last thing they intend to do is actually hail him as the King of Jews – purple robe notwithstanding.

And yet there is something here. Something authentic about Jesus as king in this circumstance. No, not befitting. Not at all. But something authentic. For, as we heard in our Sunday Gospel reading, *“Jesus called [his disciples] together and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them. Not so with you.”* Not in the least to condone what the mocking soldiers did to Jesus, but to highlight what Jesus was willing to undergo—the thorny crown, the mock robe, the slaps and whips—that is what makes Jesus a true king.

But what should a “King of the Jews” look like? If you know your Old Testament, you know that it was full of *types and pictures*. For example, the Passover Lamb was a picture of Jesus, the sacrifice for our sin. You know that the Old Testament priests who made sacrifices for the sin of the people were pictures of Jesus our perfect high priest who made sacrifice for the sin of all people. There are many many more Old Testament pictures with New Testament fulfillments.

And the king of the Jews was one of those Old Testament pictures. In the Old Testament, the Israelite people (and, in case you are wondering what is the difference between Jews and Israelites, the Israelites were called Israelites until about 600BC from when they were called Jews. Two names, same people). So the Old Testament Israelite tribes came out of the slavery of Egypt in about 1400BC. At that time, God gave the Israelites rules for what their king should be like. But here is the funny part. Israel didn’t have a king, and they wouldn’t have a king for another 400 years. Almost like writing the Constitution enumerating the powers of Congress in 1787, but there not being a Congress until 2187AD. But anyway, in 1400BC, in Deuteronomy chapter 17, God wrote down the rules for the king of the Israelites, AKA the king of the Jews.

Here are some of the things God told the Israelites about their kings: *“The king must not acquire great numbers of horses for himself… He must not take many wives… He must not accumulate large amounts of silver and gold.”* (vv.16-17). In essence, he was not to act very kingly, was he? He was not to be hungry for power or money or pleasure. If you can’t have all of that, then what is the point of being a king? Imagine being a king and you show up at the UN in a mid-size car, with a department store suit – I mean, how much are other world leaders going to respect you? They are going to raise their eyebrows, give you amused looks and cold-fish handshakes.

Listen to a few more of the rules, *“When he takes the throne of his kingdom, he is to write for himself on a scroll a copy of this law.”* (18). So you’d think that when you get to be king, you would be set. All you sixth graders out there, just remember this. One of the first things the king of the Jews had was a writing assignment. He was to hand-write the book of Deuteronomy. In my Bible, that is about 40 pages. I thought that is why kings had secretaries. In fact, that is why kings have secretaries. But not the king of the Jews. *“[His copy of this law] is to be with him, and he is to read it all the days of his life so that he may learn to revere the Lord his God.”*

It sounds like a nightmare. The king can’t have fun, plus he has lots of homework. Well, it doesn’t get any better.

*“[He is] not to consider himself better than his brothers and turn from the law to the right or to the left”* (20). One of the things that is sort of expected in monarchies is that there are rules for everyone else, and then rules (or a lack of them) for the king. But God said that just as the people were to be subject to God’s laws, so too, in exactly the same way, without any exception, the kings of the Jews were to be subject to those rules.

When you look at those soldiers brutalizing and humiliating Jesus, you realize that he truly is the prophesied King of the Jews. It hurts you in your heart when you hear them mock, “Hail, king of the Jews,” but you realize the truth of it. Not just that he is our king. But that he is everything God ever wanted in one of those Old Testament pictures of a king. Not after money, pleasure or power, but other’s good. One concerned, not for his own well-being, but the well-being of his people. One concerned not about his own freedom, but in fulfilling the will of God the Father. One willing to step off his throne, out of his palace, down the street to the filthiest shack, willing to live in that for the sake of his people. That is Jesus, the King of the Jews whom the soldiers salute, “Hail, King of the Jews!”

Here in this country of America, we like presidents. In fact, this was a country founded on the rally cry of “Anybody but a king!” We like people whom we can elect—and unelect. We like leaders who have a very limited right to tell us what to do, even less right to tell us what to say, and no right whatsoever to tell us what to think.

Are you ready for Jesus to be the king of your life? Or do you want a president you can impeach, unelect, throw out of office? When I ask that question, remember that Jesus is like no king this world has ever seen. This King of the Jews is the prophesied ruler and protector of God’s people. He rules as king for your good. He considered himself one with us, even to the point of the shameful mocking of these soldiers and the humiliation and pain of the cross for you.

Acclaim Jesus, “King of the Jews,” “King of My Life”, who has the right to rule my life like a king. Amen.