

OPENING:

A few years, an article came out that said that when Netflix mailed you movies to watch in your home, the #1 DVD that stayed in your house, unwatched, the longest was a tie between *Schindler's List* and *Hotel Rwanda*, movies about the Holocaust and the Rwandan genocide, respectively.

Apparently, people liked the idea of renting these important, historical, and painful movies, more than actually watching them.¹

So, the red DVD sleeve and disc would sit on top of your TV cabinet or on your coffee table, daring you to watch, imploring you to view them. But people would prefer to look away and watch something else.

I find our Gospel lesson to be like that, especially coming at this time of year. We hear this, difficult, familiar story of Jesus' death, coming at an unfamiliar time. We see it, we know it, but would prefer to look away.

So today, if you came expecting Thanksgiving, you got Good Friday. It seems a little bit like a case of false advertising, this "Christ the King" Sunday. The DVD cover, so to speak, does not fit the movie inside of it.

We are poised to enter into the holiday season and want some helpful preparation for it, instead we get a murder... what a way to end "Ordinary" time.

Of course, the topsy-turvy, upside-down quality of this day has something to teach us, both about our faith lives and about the nature of God's relationship with us.

CALENDAR:

Let's tackle the calendar first:

Every year, Christ the King Sunday marks the end of the church Calendar Year. Next week we will start afresh with "Advent I" (Year A and the Gospel of Matthew if you are really keeping score).

¹ John Swansburg "A Very Long Engagement." *Slate* (September 5, 2008); <https://slate.com/culture/2008/09/the-netflix-rentals-slate-readers-just-can-t-bring-themselves-to-watch.html>

Now, Advent, of course, features the leadup to Christ's birth. From there, it's a sprint through the story as Christmas leads to Epiphany, then to Lent, Easter, and so on, all the heavy hitters. Then sometime next Spring 2023 we will be back in Ordinary Time, the name the church gives for the season after Pentecost.

We might want to jump ahead past today's story, jump to the birth, jump to the Wisemen, jump to the joy, jump all the way to Christ seated on the throne next to the Father.

But today reminds us, as we look forward, that we also need to look back. The drama of this moment places us at that vantage point of being at both the beginning and the end.

We are right on the *precipice* of the story with a unique perspective of past, present and future.

ORDINARY TIME

So, when we look back on Ordinary Time, on the past five months or so, it's worth marveling at the so-called 'ordinariness' of it.

We have gotten to know Jesus, we have travelled with him through the ups and downs.

We have been dazzled and mystified and enlightened as Jesus taught/ preached/ healed/ and the rest.

We've maybe even heard one too many parables and asked ourselves where this movie is headed.

But it's in these "everyday" moments of Jesus' ministry, in all the highs and lows of what he did and what he taught, that the disciples experienced who Jesus was. And those moments of "Ordinary Time" were enough to propel the disciples through the rest of their lives and onto their deaths.

And it makes me think that, for us too, it's sometimes *outside* the high moments of the drama, where you look back on the everyday moments of living, of working, of parenting, of dealing with coworkers, and we say that *those* were the moments of truth and beauty that stick with us, and transcend this world.

Liturgical scholars put it this way: "... it is... in these Sundays after Pentecost that we actually live—that is, in the period between the first and final coming (Advent)... (there) all of time, past, present, and future is laid before us to be celebrated in the mystery of the liturgical year."²

It would be easier, if life, were all one predictable path where things got easier perpetually, and if the church calendar made us into perfect Christians.... That's the confounding part: our understanding of God is not a constant and predictable upward path towards a recognizable goal, but a surprising and unknowable journey that lends itself to a more cyclical understanding of time.

As a holiday, the Feast of Christ the King puts all that in hyper relief, hyper focus. It's a new holiday and it began at another precipice in time, after the end of the 1st World War, "the war to end all wars" and was declared by Pope Pius XI as a reminder of a new age, as the dawn of a new era in humanity. It did not work, Feast of Christ the King, needless to say, and so still it sits there awkwardly as a crucified Lord, as a Carpenter King.

SATURDAY

Standing on the precipice of a new year, another way to think about it is this, at the risk of mixing my metaphors, that we are living in a perpetual "Saturday."

That is, our Gospel story is the story of Good Friday, we know the pain and loss and sadness of that day.

Likewise, we also understand Sunday, the day of resurrection and rescue and rebirth, a day of hope. We are in between that:

"(O)urs is the long day's journey of the Saturday."³

Jesus Christ situated himself at this fault line, at a dividing line, at the Place called the Skull: everything is about to change, where we are coming to the end, but it also starts to look very much like the beginning.

Famously this fired the Medieval imagination which said that Adam, the first man, was buried at the exact spot where Jesus died. Thus the Last Man, Jesus and his death and burial in the ground led to the rebirth and resurrection of Adam, the 1st Man.

² Mitchell, Leonel L., and Ruth A. Meyers. 2016. *Praying Shapes Believing: a Theological Commentary on the Book of Common Prayer*. New York: Seabury, 29.

³ Steiner, George. 1989. *Real Presences*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, quoted in Wilson Poon and Tom McLeish. "Real Presences: Two Scientists' Response to George Steiner" *Theology Today* (Vol. 102, 1999): 169-176.

https://www2.ph.ed.ac.uk/~wckp/Steiner_Theology.pdf

The Medieval Legend went so far as to say that where the blood from the cross drips down through a crack in the stone and waters the rebirth of humanity.

CONCLUSION

Modern scholars disparage these Medieval flights of fancy, but at least they were able to sustain their gaze, to look at this thing that we would rather not watch. Today, we do what Jesus beckons us to do but what we don't want to do, which is to behold that image of Christ the King on the cross.

Jesus is there, hangs there, presents himself on the precipice between Good Friday and what happens on Easter Sunday, right on the threshold between two things.

A thief is on one side of him, and a thief is on the other.

Jesus is in between the two, his arms outstretched, long enough to wrap around the both of them, long enough to cover the whole breadth of time, declaring that he offers salvation for both.

One thief mocks him, another calls out for Jesus to save him. Jesus again is between the two, closing the chasm, saying:

“I am both King and servant. I offer both—salvation in this world and in the next...to sinner... and to believer.... I transcend time and place.” Stretching out his arms, and through the powerful example of his self-offering, he is King over that time and this time and all time.

He tells the thief:

“*Today*, you will be with me in Paradise”

revealing to us that God's salvation fractures our own conception of time, showing us the love and mercy that can last forever, that Christ is King on this day, and on all days.

AMEN