

Christ the King

Jeremiah 23:1-6

Last Sunday we heard “the time is near.” Today we hear the Lord declare the days are coming!

Well, I'm reliably informed that there is less than one calendar month until Christmas Eve. What?! There's so much to do. There's the tree, the presents, the food, the services, the end of year commitments, the Christmas cards and messages. There's too much! With less than a month to Christmas, where are your thoughts? It's interesting that this close to Christmas, our Gospel reading points not to the birth of Jesus,



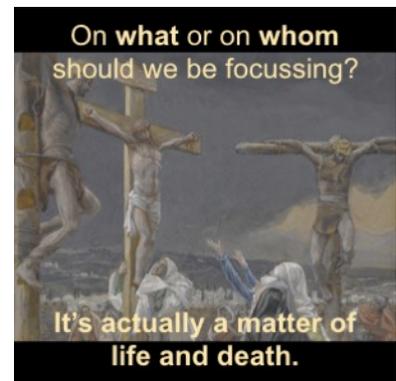
Coles announces hot cross buns will be sold all year round by popular demand

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but to His death on the cross. Is that why Coles are selling hot cross buns now??? And in Paul's letter to the Colossians, we are pointed to this cross of death as the means by which Almighty God has made peace with the world. “Peace on earth and good will toward all people.”

So as we prepare for Christmas, should we be focusing on death? Should we be focusing on birth? Or is our focus simply to be on the one who comes and what he does? Should our focus and our preparations, the meditations of our

hearts, simply be on Jesus who asks, “Who do you say that I am?” It's not just a matter of busyness in preparations and the trimmings, is it? It's a matter of death and it's a matter of life, as we are met by Jesus. For two criminals dying on crosses next to Jesus, this was the question. For one, it meant rejection of Jesus and it meant his death. For the other, it meant looking to Jesus for mercy in the face of death, and receiving new life in paradise. A matter of death and life. Who do you say Jesus is? The answer we give will inform all our preparations in the next month — our daily actions, our words, our interactions with others, and our witness to the people and world around us.



On the last Sunday of the church year, we begin with the death of Jesus to prepare for the coming celebrations of his birth and the new life he brings for people.

For new life to emerge, there must first be death. This was promised long ago.

In our Old Testament reading, the prophet Jeremiah is sent by God to warn and to judge. God's people had turned from Him. Their focus was in the wrong place. They indulged in false and idol worship and self fulfilment.

And so God called Jeremiah, and gave him authority to break down evil and then build up righteousness. Jeremiah was called to go to the people and call them to repentance. But they ignored him. And so as we come to Jeremiah 23 today, we hear God's judgment. There must be

destruction before rebuilding can commence. There must be death before new life can spring forth.

“I will bestow punishment on you for the evil you have done, declares the Lord.” The punishment for sin is death; and if that doesn’t terrify our consciences, then like the shepherds of Judah we’re not hearing God. Or we turn in repentance. It’s a matter of life and death.

But with judgment and death, comes promise and life. God says, “I myself will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them and will bring them back to their pasture, where they will be fruitful and increase in number... The days are coming, says the Lord, when I will raise up to David a righteous branch, a king who will reign wisely and do what is right and just in the land.” This king of David’s branch is, of course, Jesus, the servant king whose birth we look forward to celebrating at Christmas, and whom we hear today raised up on the coronation cross. And the question for those around him is the question he puts to us: “Who do you say that I am?”

The punishment for sin, your sin, my sin, all sin — death — must be carried on the shoulders of this shepherd. Just as the message of Jeremiah is destruction and rebuilding, death before life, so the true Shepherd goes willingly to the cross for a criminal, for us, and for all people who by nature are sinful and unclean. There must be death. But in Jesus comes the promise of life, new life, eternal life, resurrection life, for all who put their hope in him. And this is our focus preparing for Christmas. Death and resurrection. Jesus for us.

There is absolutely nothing we can do to save ourselves. As much as we want to think we can get enough brownie points, we can’t. We can’t! So we rightly look forward to Christmas, to birth, to new life because we already know the story of the birth in the stable leads to the new dawn of Easter life, eternal life. That is what informs our Christmas preparations as Christians in this next month.

And we prepare by hearing the story for us, the story of Christ who through death brings life for us. We come to participate in God’s new life work in baptism. As Paul says in Romans, “Don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.” Death and new life. The rhythm of the Christian. Death and new life: the rhythm of the Christian community. That rhythm, that promise of God carries us. And we come here to receive the Lord’s Supper, the body and blood of Christ no less, given and shed for us in death so that we may live. And daily we are called to die to our old selves and to live the new life of faith. Drowning the old sinful person, rising and living the life of repentance and new life. Coming to Christ in worship and daily devotion and prayer. We seek to do His will. Sharing the good news. To hear and to tell and to live the story of new life through Christ’s death. Now that is the way to prepare for Christmas!! During the season of Advent, together we prepare as we look. We look forward to Christmas as we look to Jesus now.

So let your preparations be full. Not with worry about all the things to be done, not just with the tree and the trimmings. But with the tree of Christ and the criminal who cries out with us, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” Let your, let our full focus be on Jesus, the crucified and risen Lord, the promised one, the coming one, the one sent by God to us and for us to save us, and let’s tell the world Christ is coming. Christ is here. Amen.

