

Texts: 2 Kings 22:1-20, 23:1-3; Mark 8:27-29

Subject: Josiah's Reforms

Theme: Live the Story

Christ the King Sunday after Pentecost; Nov. 24, 2019, Reformation Lutheran Church, Las Vegas, NV

Grace and peace to you from God our father in heaven and the Lord Jesus,
Amen.

My kids are always losing things. Just last night, my three year-old Jacob was looking all over the house for a little piece to a toy. He was dumping toy boxes, and digging in his closet, and he just couldn't find what he was looking for. I guess it's like father, like son - *I lost my wallet this week*. Ugh! It's the worst. I haven't felt like myself - it must be because my personal information is floating out there in the world somewhere. I'm without identification. I keep patting my back pocket out of habit and there's no wallet there, just my backside. I don't know what to do. My mother would tell me, "nothing is lost in the eyes of God." She's right.

The story of King Josiah is a story of lost and found.

I have to confess: these long historical narratives are not my favorite parts of the Bible. There are so many names, and the stories get drawn out over many chapters with tales of war and violence, and my brain just glazes over sometimes. But the story of 2 Kings is this history of the people of Israel and Judah, and King Josiah reigned at a particularly difficult time. In the late 7th century, the northern kingdom had long been destroyed. The Southern Kingdom of Judah was hanging on, barely, kind of a territory of Assyria. The people had lived under kings who had led them to worship of foreign gods, and there was confusion and disorder. Some of the kings were good, like Hezekiah, some were much worse. Mansessah was one that seemed to hide away the book of the law - he lifted up idols, astral worship, magic, witchcraft, and even sacrificed his own

son. Our text today certainly lifts up his grandson - Josiah as one of the best ever. He's from King David's family, and takes the throne at just age 8, after his father was killed by his own servants. Young Josiah takes on the task of repairing the temple in Jerusalem. He takes the money that the priests have collected from the people and gives it to the workers - and spares no expense to get the job done. He's a faithful king. While the work is going on, they find the book of the law - we know it as Deuteronomy in the Hebrew Bible.

Good King Josiah, upon hearing the word is convicted, and tears his clothes in repentance. He heard something that made him see things in a new way. Paul writes in Romans (3:20) "through the law comes knowledge sin." Josiah knew their past was catching up with them. They had forgotten their story - the Kings didn't lead faithfully - the priests did not preach it, the people didn't read it. Josiah's only hope was to help the people turn back to God, to focus on the Word they had rediscovered, and *live the story*.

Before acting on the discovery of the book of the law, Josiah took it to a female prophet - Huldah - to ask her what God would do next. She tells Josiah that God is going to bring wrath against Judah, but that he would die peacefully before it happened. We're not sure how Josiah died exactly, he was young, it may have been in battle, but what is known is that Babylon would come along in the decades to follow and conquer the people, taking many into exile. It's not as simple as: *obey and be blessed, disobey and be cursed*. Josiah ends up being a kind of prophet King, trying to turn the people back to the Lord, but dying in the faith, prior to the fall of the southern kingdom.

The Word inspires Josiah to be transformed. He would reinstitute the practice of faithful worship by the same, often violent, means with which it was destroyed. The local

worship sites were pulled down, altars were broke to pieces, idolatrous priests cut down. The people would worship the Lord again, and learn their true identity as God's people. For centuries, Israel had trusted in the King to lead them, some were terrible, some were okay - but it was the Word of God that had the real power.

What authority do we give to God's word in our lives? Rolf Jacobsen writes about the word being locked away in the temple by the high priests. During Luther's time, it was locked away from the average person who couldn't read Latin. In our time, it's often locked up by chains of dust on our shelves and tables. How do we stay connected with our story in scripture? We have to engage in reading it, in hearing it in worship, in living it in our homes.

One of the latest online trends is posting a photo of yourself from ten years ago, in 2009 next to a current picture for 2019. I guess nostalgia is high as we get ready to enter a new decade. Ten years ago, I was getting ready to enter seminary - Ivy and I had come to the decision that we would move to Iowa in the summer of 2010. It was exciting, and scary too. We were nervous, but faithful, trusting that it was the Word that was calling us to ministry. Forty-nine years ago, the church witnessed the ordination of Elizabeth Platz, the first woman to be ordained by a Lutheran church body (LCA) in North America. I cannot imagine the struggles she faced, but I do know that she must have been certain that it was the Word of God, and the help of many that led her to that place.

The Word transforms us.

Christ the King is the last Sunday of the church year - the day we remember that it is the living Word of God that we encounter here in worship. It is the Word that

changes us - reforms us to live as God's people, to exalt Jesus - the incarnate and living Word of God as the highest power in our lives. To put anything - anything - above that is to fall into the same sin as those who would lock that word up and hide it away. This is not just for ordained pastors and deacons. No matter the work we do, to *live the story* means that we can see our lives through the lens of God's story and find our identity in the love and grace of God.

We live the story when we remember to see the face of Christ in each neighbor. We are living it when we forget ourselves, and seek to uplift the other. We don't always get it right, so we're still living the story when we repent of the ways we've failed to put God first in our lives. When we come to the table and receive the means of grace here, we are living the story. We live the story when we go and tell of the good things God is doing and has done in our lives, when we remind someone else that Jesus is near in their time of need, when we forgive, and when we remind one another of God's promises in baptism:

'You have been sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever.'

That's who we are - children of the King. Sealed by the same Spirit. Marked by that same cross. The Word reminds us, calls us, claims us. *The Word is never lost.*

We don't have a king - but I think we still get the imagery. Kings had the power to lead by making decrees, to build up and tear down; to lead with wisdom and justice, or to enrich themselves and their family members; to lead the people into battle, or to make peace. The people didn't have a choice about whether to follow the King - he ruled.

The same question Jesus asked his disciples: “Who do you say that I am?” is one we still consider thousands of years later. Is Jesus a good idea to cheer us up when we’re down? Is Jesus the team we cheer for against others who follow a different team? Or is Jesus the living God, ruling with truth and grace for the whole universe? It’s true Christ is not like these other Kings - he didn’t ride triumphantly into battle to turn away evildoers, he forgave them from the cross and died for the sake of the world. He didn’t bury his enemies and conquer their cities, but was laid in a tomb. He didn’t overthrow the empire from the back of a donkey, but rose from the grave in glory, and ascended to heaven. He doesn’t send his soldiers to conquer, but sends us the Holy Spirit to live in our hearts - to lead us to the way of humble service for our neighbors.

The risen Christ rules in our hearts when we live the story of faith - it’s the one passed down to us from parents and grandparents, teachers, pastors, friends, and neighbors. It may be hidden at times, but it is never lost. Christ is never far from us, never lost to us, always near in times of trial. This king doesn’t seek power or wealth, but peace, and joy, reconciliation, and renewal. The Word is powerful and is always transforming us, making us ready for the coming of the kingdom in our lives.

Amen.