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Christ Reigns C
Peace, Seattle
November 24, 2013
Luke 24:33-43

FROM KENNEDY TO JESUS TO JORDAN

Where were you when you heard the news? It's a question people have been asking and answering all last week on the 50th anniversary of JFK's death. And I've been amazed at how closely bound—and laden with emotion—the recollections have been.

I remember the announcement by Mrs. Morris my first grade teacher that something terrible had taken place; I remember being sent home from school; and what happened next is hard wired in me:
My Dad bursting through the back door, crying out, "THEY SHOT HIM!" and hurling down the basement stairs to turn on the television.

If you are old enough to remember that day 50 years ago, you have your own recollections of when time stood still, and a whole nation grieved.

Something was taken from us that day, and whether that "something" was based on myth or reality, it seems we've spent the better part of 50 years trying to get back what was lost.

I called my folks on Friday, to ask about their experiences 50 years ago, and to check my memories against their own. I learned several things in the phone call that I didn't know or hadn't remembered. One of them was this….

The Montana weather was bitterly cold that weekend—too cold to play outside—and with nothing but news coverage on every channel, my brother and I needed something to do, so we used the time to build a little stable, a home to house Mary, Joseph, baby Jesus and our other crèche figurines.

Thinking of those two events now, juxtaposed—the death of our president and the crude stable in which Christ was born—a line from the hymn WHAT CHILD IS THIS comes to mind.

Why lies he in such mean estate where ox and ass are feeding?
Good Christian, fear; for sinners here the silent Word is pleading
Nails, spear shall pierce him through the cross be borne for me, for you
Hail, hail the Word made flesh, the babe, the son of Mary!

This Child, born of Mary, who would spend his life revealing the ALTENDER side of an ALMIGHTY God, is destined for the cross, the words say. And today, on the feast of Christ the King, that is where Luke's takes us.

Hanging on a cross, moments before he takes his final breath, we watch as Jesus is caught up in one final exchange. The two criminals crucified with him are debating who of them deserves death and who does not.

JESUS, calls the one, REMEMBER ME, WHEN YOU COME INTO YOUR KINGDOM.
And we watch Jesus reach out one more time—not with hands but with voice—across the chasm that separates humanity from God; reaching with the promise:
TRULY I TELL YOU, TODAY YOU WILL BE WITH ME IN PARADISE.

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Why this text on the final Sunday of the church's year?

Because the reign Christ came to inaugurate is a hidden reign, disguised in suffering and powerlessness and godforsakenness. Yet, says the gospel, this is precisely where God meets us. This is where God in Christ reigns: at the cross.

The ongoing task of Christian communities, then, is to keep asking the question:
Where is Christ's reign, this hidden kingship, showing itself within our lives, our congregation, our world? Where is God revealing Godself today?

Today's answer is this: Christ's reign is hidden in the waters of this font.

Today, the crucified and risen one reaches out to little JORDAN LEE with the promise:
THIS DAY AND ALWAYS, I WILL BE WITH YOU, AND YOU WILL BE WITH ME.

Heidi and Chris, I love the name you've chosen for your little guy: JORDAN, like the river.

The River Jordan looms large in the story of God's people.
- This ribbon of water marks the boundary between past and present; between what Israel was and what it would become.
- Crossing the Jordan for the first time meant leaving behind 40 years worth of WILDERNESS and starting anew in a land of milk and honey.
- The flowing river was a symbol that God's promises would find fulfillment in God's good time.

When John the Baptist began his ministry at this same River, centuries later, he called God's people to relinquish everything that stood between them and God; and to reorient their lives by wading in the waters to be washed and made new.

Jesus' own ministry was inaugurated at this same river, when the VOICE from heaven said:
YOU ARE MY SON, MY BELOVED, WITH YOU I AM WELL PLEASED.

Now it's little Jordan's turn to wade in this water...

And just as God promised to Jaxson and Jasmine, God promises today—to little brother Jordan—that the Spirit will be here, hidden in the water, binding herself to Jordan and binding Jordan to the story of God's people; binding him to Christ's death and resurrection and making of Jordan a new creation, a beloved son and heir.

What will Jordan's journey in this life look like? No one knows. But what we do know is this: he will be companioned by a Lord who created him for good, and by a Savior who'll stick with him in good seasons and in bad; whether Jordan is flowing low, high, or even, at times, feeling dry.

Yes, all this, because he wades in the water…

Now, Jordan, its fair to say, will have no recollection of this day of his baptism.

So your job, Heidi and Chris, your job, Karl and Fran, your job, sponsors and family members, your job, People of God, is to remember for him…to tell him the story again and again—every detail—'til it is so deeply engrained in his memory, so much a part of him, that it becomes an unerring compass for him—an unshakable, inalienable identity.

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In a world that seeks to disorient our children, to confuse them, and question their worth, we have been given a holy charge.

- It is our duty and delight to teach Jordan to look for God in places where we'd least expect him.
- To discern Christ's presence in the worst circumstances as well as well as the most joyous.
- To teach him through our own prayers and our own lives that God can be trusted, and that he—and each of us, too—is LOVED with a LOVE that far outstrips our ability to comprehend.
- A LOVE that encompasses and, finally, overwhelms the crises—large or small—that populate our days.

Christ calls us through the waters of baptism to wade in that LOVE, and at the Table to eat and drink it so that we may become one with it, with him, and spread it around.

There are unbidden events and experiences that will leave their mark on us all our days.

But in the end, none is more powerful or lasting as what God accomplishes today with this child, in this water, by this promise.

Amen.

JORDAN, like the man whose moves on the basketball court flowed as smoothly as water.