Christ the King Sunday
November 23, 2025
Luke 23: 33-43

Seasons rise and fall in a community's life. Seasons, where the wind shifts and the scent in the air changes, and the land seems to pause in its breathing.

And there are seasons in the life of a church too, where something new gathers quietly. Not in a dramatic way. More like the slow brightening of dawn across familiar fields. One day you simply notice there is more light than before.

Today is such a day.
Christ the King Sunday.

And my first Sunday standing with you as pastor of the Niagara Shared Ministry. Faith in St. Catharines. Good Shepherd in Niagara Falls. Trinity in Fort Erie. I hold this moment carefully, the way a person cradles a stone warmed by the sun at the lake's edge, knowing it carries the quiet story of water and time.

Christ the King Sunday has always been a curious place to end the church year. Even in my earliest days of preaching, I wondered why the final image of the season is a king.

Kings no longer carry the meanings they once did. They seem like figures from another age.

And then the Gospel speaks.
Not a throne.
Not a crown glittering inside a palace.
But a barren hill.
A cross set into the ground.
A man hanging between two others whose lives had taken crooked paths.
Above him a sign meant to mock: This is the King of the Jews.

If we linger with this scene, we see how it stands in its own harsh light and refuses to look away. Nothing is softened. Nothing is dressed up. It is like the raw moment at the edge of a prairie town or a lakeside village, where beauty and sorrow live so close together they share the same breath.

In such places people know that hearts are tender things, always searching for a corner of the world where they will not be lost or overlooked, but gathered in and held as part of the story.

Here, Jesus does not save himself.
He does not meet violence with violence.
He simply remains present in suffering, and he listens to the quiet voice beside him.

A thief speaks.
It is almost a whisper.
Jesus, remember me.

The request is tiny. It is almost shy. Yet it contains the deepest longing we know. Do not forget me. Do not let my story fall away like dust. Hold me in your memory even if no one else does.

And Jesus answers,
“Today you will be with me in paradise.”

No royal decree.
No flourish or power play.
Only mercy.
Only presence.

This is the king we meet today.
This is the king who chooses kindness over force.

This also feels like the right story for the beginning of our shared ministry. We, too, are stepping into something that is not built on power or prestige. It is a relationship. It is a weaving together of histories and hopes from three congregations. It is a joining of stories. It is a remembering.

A word in this Gospel often goes unnoticed. The thief asks Jesus to remember him. In English, the request can sound

passive, yet with closer attention, it becomes something deeper.

To remember means to gather the pieces of a life. It means bringing together what has been scattered. It means re membering, the holy work of putting the members of a body back together in wholeness.

Re-membering is a healing act.

And this is what Christ does on the cross. He takes a man who has been cut off from hope and binds him into a new story. He restores him. He holds him in love. He gathers him back into the family of God.

This is not only the story of a dying thief. It is the story of the Church. It is the story of communities like ours. It is the calling we share across the Niagara region.

Faith Lutheran in St. Catharines has long carried the memory of a faithful and thoughtful community. People who study, reflect, pray, and seek meaning with depth. In this congregation, re-membering looks like creating space where every person is known, where the thoughtful life of faith welcomes those who feel fragmented by the demands of life. Healing happens through connection and gentle presence.

Good Shepherd in Niagara Falls offers a spirit shaped by resilience. The roar of the Falls is always nearby,

reminding us of both strength and tenderness. This congregation has lived through transitions and changes. Re-membering here means welcoming neighbours, creating belonging, making sure no one falls through the cracks. Healing rises like mist from the water. It reminds us that Christ gathers us even when life feels turbulent.

Trinity in Fort Erie is a place shaped by borderlands, by horizon, by the meeting of water and land. People here know how to hold tradition and hospitality together. Re-membering in this congregation looks like rebuilding community where people feel anchored, rooted, and known. Healing comes through hospitality, compassion, and the steady courage to care.

Three congregations.
Three stories.
Three histories.

Now gathered into one shared ministry.
Each congregation keeps its own character.
Christ draws these strengths into a shared calling.

For Christ re-members you into a new pattern of life.
Christ fits the pieces together into a beautiful whole.

This is not an accident. It is grace.

Christ the King Sunday once carried a weight it was never meant to bear. People tried to turn it into a banner of

earthly power, as if Christ ruled the way empires rule, with force and fear.

But power like that has a hard edge. It cuts more than it heals. It leaves people scattered, the way wind scatters dry leaves across a field.

True healing does not come from dominance. It comes from the kind of strength that gathers people back to themselves, and back to one another.

But the lectionary gives us this Gospel today for a reason. It wants us to see that Christ's kingship is not domination. It is not force. It is not a throne that towers above others.

It is mercy.
It is remembering.
It is healing.
It is kindness sturdy enough to bear the weight of the world.

Christ reigns not through fear, but through love stronger than fear.
Christ reigns not through armies, but through compassion that refuses to abandon anyone.
Christ reigns not through threats, but through the steady, courageous tenderness that remembers us back into life.

This is the king we follow.
This is the kingdom we are called to embody.

And this is the work before us in the Niagara Shared Ministry.
To be agents of remembering.
To be communities where people discover that they are not alone.
To be a place where brokenness is met with love and where despair is answered with compassion.

We stand together at a threshold.
You with your stories.
Me with mine.
Christ in our midst.
Not above us, but with us.

The promise he spoke to the thief is the promise he speaks to us now.

Today you will be with me.
Today mercy will guide you.
Today the kingdom will unfold through kindness.

May Christ meet you in the places where your heart feels scattered.
May the One who remembers all things gather your story with tenderness.
May you find strength in the mercy that holds you and guides you.
May the peace of Christ rest upon your spirit and steady your steps as you go.

May Christ our King reign through the healing work of remembering.
May each of our congregations participate in this holy gathering of lives.
And may this shared ministry become a place where Christ's compassion is known and lived.

And may this be so among us.
Amen.