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 Advent 3 (extended Advent)/The Last Sunday after Pentecost C; Luke 23:33-43
 23 November 2025

Norma Jean was done on Porter Wagoner's country musical variety show.
 And Norma Jean's replacement was very different.
 She had bleach blonde hair and fire engine red lipstick,
 And she sounded different—
 while Norma Jean's voice was a soothing alto,
 the new girl singer's voice was higher and quite unique—
 some folks even said she sounded like Minnie Mouse.
 Letters started to pour in,
 asking to bring Norma Jean back,
 or at least get rid of the new girl.
 This was NOT what
 people had come
 to expect.

Though it's easy to brush over now, Jesus too failed to meet people's expectations.
 That is best encapsulated by the fact that the ancient Judeans wanted a warrior-king,
 someone who would overthrow the oppressive Roman rule,
 and allow ancient Israel again an independent state,
 free to govern themselves.
 And it's no wonder.
 The Romans ruled with an iron fist.

That mismatch— what people expect and what Jesus gives— is evident throughout the Gospels.
 When Jesus is referred to as king by other people, it is often cruel, like we heard today:
 "This is the King of the Judeans." and "If you're the king, save yourself!"
 It's mocking; it's derisive.
 It's supposed to be holding up a mirror to all he is NOT
 all he's NOT doing.

And yet somehow despite the complete and utter failure to meet expectations,
 somehow, the king title stuck, so much so that now, 2000 years later,
 We have a Christ the King Sunday every year.
 We have hymn upon hymn that refer to Jesus as King.
 Why? Why not drop the title if it were incorrect?

Well, Christians still call Jesus King because we still believe him to be king, somehow,
just not in a ruler of a nation-state kind of way.

Some folks came to believe Jesus was offering a different kind of citizenship,
a different way of belonging, a different way of meaning-making

As with any good leader, Jesus as king sets the tone.

And the tone he is setting is inviting folks into is one of a shift in perspective.

Jesus gives us a way to think differently about ourselves and about others
about how expansive God's love is
about what it means to die,
about what it means to live,
about who our neighbor is.

Jesus as king also gives his followers a chance to think themselves
more than that one label we give ourselves and one another,
more than tax collector,
more than criminal,
more than a woman who is hemorrhaging
more than a fisherman.

This is not something stuck in the past.

We have a chance to think of ourselves as more than the job you thought
would bring fulfillment and yet does not
more where you thought you would be or thought you
would be doing at this point in life but you're not. or you don't.
more than your grades or SAT scores or bank account
more than being homeless,
more than being unpopular
more than being a felon
more than your diagnosis

Jesus gives us a way to recontextualize all of that so that maybe it's still true
but maybe it is no longer the most important thing.

How we see ourselves and others, how we describe our own place in the world,
can be incredibly powerful.

In fact, Jesus reminds us it's not all about us.

The second criminal at the end of today's Gospel says:

"Jesus, remember me when you come
into your kingdom."

Subverting expectations.

In the Advent season we speak of the comingS of Christ plural
 the one we will celebrate in a month and a day on Christmas Eve
 Advent also invites us to consider the second coming of Christ,
 when Christ will come again, as we say in the Nicene Creed:
 he will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead
 and his kingdom will have no end.
 We will say it in the Eucharist prayer today.
 Christ has died, Christ is risen,
 Christ will come again
 and his kingdom will
 have no end.

Advent is the perfect time to remember that God likely did not subvert our expectations
 just the one time with Jesus
 then agree to climb back in our little boxes
 and behave in ways we like and understand and even agree with
 Sometimes I wish it worked that way, because that would be easier.
 And who doesn't like easy?
 However, history and personal experiences—
 both mine and yours—suggest otherwise.

Jesus was not, is not, and never will be, someone who stops the chaos from happening.
 Jesus was not, is not, and never will be, someone who keeps bad things from happening.
 If that is what we keep looking to the divine for,
 we will be disappointed again, and again, and again.

**What Jesus did do, and does do, and always will do
 is deliver us from the tyranny of certainty.**

because certainty begets rigidity, and rigidity begets brittleness.
 And brittleness is very, very susceptible
 to the many, many changes and changes of this life,
 as one of the Collects from Compline says..

Despite numerous, vociferous complaints,
 Porter Wagoner kept Norma Jean's replacement.
 Porter did listen, though— he wasn't too rigid,
 one doesn't have the #1 syndicated musical variety television show
 without being at least a little flexible-- he shifted tactics

Whereas beforehand,

Porter would alternate songs with Norma Jean and his other so-called girl singers,
with them switching back and forth singing solos,
the two began to sing duets.

The duets were lovely; their very different voices blended beautifully.

Calls for the replacement's removal began to die down.

The new girl singer's popularity and influence and appeal grew, slowly but surely,
and then by leaps and bounds, in ways almost unprecedented

She appealed— she APPEALS —to folks across generations,
across a wide political spectrum,

having the same song hit #1 for three decades in a row.

Then again Dolly Parton has never been like anyone else.

She's Dolly.

Let us pray. O God, help us to be open and ready for however

it is that you might show up in this day and age and in the day to come.

Deliver us, O Christ, from the tyranny of certainty. Amen.