

Luke 23:33-43

Social media, for all its good uses, also has given us some unintended outcomes – one of which is public shaming.

It's where a group of people find a "weakness" in another and use the social media platform to attack, demean, and dehumanize that person in such a way that only the "weakness" remains as the person's identity, rendering the person incapable of normal function.

Just such an issue was played out in one of the episodes of the Neighborhood centered around the developing interpersonal relationship between Calvin, an African American, long time resident of a community in Los Angeles, and Dave, a white liberal, whose family moves in as Calvin's next door neighbor.

In this particular episode, Calvin's bowling partner is injured; so, Dave volunteers to fill in.

In practice, they look good as a team.

The next night, the tournament finals take place...

As Calvin prepares to bowl, the opponents don't call him by name, but use the term "Wrong Way."

Calvin's level of play is quickly diminished – he gets only one pin down.

Dave approaches Calvin about this, and Calvin finally tells him about the "game" during his junior year in high school.

Playing linebacker, he picked up a fumble and ran it all the way into the endzone for a touchdown – or so he thought.

He ran it into the wrong endzone.

All those years ago, and the mention of it still impacted his life as if it had just happened.

With Dave's help and support, Calvin was able to accept the past as past and move into a renewed sense of life.

I share this with you on this Christ the King Sunday because the dynamics of attacking, demeaning, and dehumanizing described in the Neighborhood are not isolated to one day and age.

Indeed, the Romans were well experienced in their use, especially through the use of crucifixion.

As New Testament scholar Emerson Powery has stated, "...crucifixion was a *public* performance in order to produce a *public* shaming." (Working Preacher)

It is also said that crucifixion carried the message that the crucified one was not a person.

To compound this, the soldiers cast lots for his clothing.

This 'nonperson' on the cross spoke words that shook the foundations of what was taking place:

*Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing*

The leaders attacked him – *He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one.*

Even one of the criminals crucified with him taunted him and said, *Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!*

And, in a mocking way, an inscription was placed over him, *This is the king of the Jews.*

In the midst of these taunts, attacks, and shaming, a singular voice sounds forth:

The other criminal makes a profound statement of truth unseen by others -- *...we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong.*

He doesn't ask to be saved; he simply says, *Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.*

It is a most human desire – to be remembered.

And, in a statement that has come down to us through the ages, Jesus says to this man, *Truly, I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.*

The Romans had it right – Jesus is a king – but his kingdom is unlike any they could describe.

His kingdom's instruments of power are not weapons, but love.

And, its throne is not a palace, but rather the hearts of all who come to know him and love him.  
(Synthesis 11/24)

And in Jesus' words to the penitent criminal, his kingdom is not just a future hope, but a present reality for all who put their trust in him.

Today, as we stand at the end of one Church Year and look at the beginning of another, the one constant that remains is God's love for each of us as seen through Jesus.

Our task as his Church is to invite those around us to share in this transforming love, and model, through our words and actions, what it means to live a way of life that honors his way.