

The innocent died right alongside the guilty. In fact, if you read a little before the passage of Luke that we have as our lection today, you'll see that Jesus died instead of a guilty person because the people asked that Barabbas, a notorious criminal be freed instead of Jesus. That doesn't seem like justice nor does this man stretched out on a cross really seem to live up to the title above his name – king of the Jews.

Yet Jesus IS a king. As one person of the Trinity, He is a Creator, who has been with humanity since the beginning of time. He has authority over all things. Yet way back when we lived in the Garden of Eden we set into motion events that would mean that a loving king would need to die for us to restore us to himself – to help us regain that everlasting life in paradise. We set up that unjust equation – because only an innocent who had never sinned could divert the effects of our sin upon himself. Jesus is a servant king who saves us and who gives us an example of how we should lead others.

Through example, Jesus teaches us that a disciple of Christ first must love others with an unquenchable love. That means loving all others, regardless of their actions. Even though all of us are what we would consider good people, compared to a holy and perfect God, we fall short. Yet Jesus still loves us enough to die for us. Others will fall short of what we consider to be our standards. Yet we are called to still love them sacrificially.

If we follow Christ we will also use our power and authority to help others. Throughout this lectionary year we have been studying the Gospel of Luke. A central piece of Luke's theology is that, as a leader, Jesus consistently left himself open to negative consequences – mocking, alienation from the religious elite, and ultimately death to be sure that every individual is saved. Luke's Jesus, in fact, goes out of his way to help and save society's outcasts – those people who are hardest to love and hardest for us to think of sacrificing for. Some of them were victims of circumstances, others may have brought their misfortunes on themselves. No matter. Jesus used his kingship to restore all these people to wholeness. As followers of Christ, we are called to do this as well. When we take on the responsibility of leadership, we take on the responsibility to give generously of all that we have and all that we are so that those under our care can thrive.

Once upon a time there was a kingdom of monkeys, ruled by a very large and very wise monkey king. The monkeys lived near a stand of mango trees which ran alongside a river and enjoyed a constant supply of these delicious fruits. One day the king noticed a castle being built downstream from the mango trees. He ordered the monkeys to gather all the mangoes from the trees. They dutifully responded, and collected all the mangoes. Well – not quite all. They made one mistake – they missed one that was hidden behind a bird's nest. One day this mango fell from the tree into the river. The human king who inhabited the recently built castle was swimming in the river. As the mango passed, he picked it up and ate it. So impressed was he that the human king determined to gain more mangoes, and set out with his guards in search of the mango trees.

When the human king found the mangoes he also found the monkeys. Though the monkeys were willing to share the mangoes with him, the human king wasn't. Deciding he would have all the mangoes for himself he ordered his soldiers to pursue and slay the monkeys.

When news of this reached the wise monkey king he sadly knew that the day he feared had arrived. The soldiers chased the monkeys through the forest until they came to the edge of a tall cliff. The monkey king knew that if he could get his subjects across the other side they would be safe. But how to do it?

The monkey king took his huge body and used it to form a bridge between the cliffs. One by one his subjects climbed over him to safety. The king grew increasingly wearied and bruised, but knew he must hold on. Finally, when the last monkey had crossed the bridge, the monkey king collapsed.

The human king had witnessed the whole scene from high on the hill. He was so moved by the monkey king's sacrifice that he ordered his guards to find a way down the rocky cliff and rescue the monkey king. The guards found him, barely alive, and brought him back to the king. The human king ordered his best doctors to care for the monkey king and waited for him to regain consciousness. When he did so the human king asked "You are their king, why did you bother to die for them?"

The monkey king replied, "Because **I am** their king.

Our king Jesus died for us – to keep us safe despite bad things that happen in the world – despite bad decisions or mistakes we might make. To that king we owe all our allegiance, love and talents used in service and love for others.

Amen

Monkey king story taken from Storiesforpreaching.com