

**Christ the King
Holy Comforter Church
The Rev. John E. Shields
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Do you feel like you have been caught in some sort of time warp?

For those who pay attention to this sort of thing, you might be saying, “Wait a minute, did we just read the trail of Jesus before Pilate? Isn’t that supposed to occur during Holy Week?”

OK, you caught us.

We were just trying to see if you were paying attention.

It isn’t Holy Week!

But, trust me on this, we did read the correct gospel.

So what is going on? This Sunday is known as Christ the King Sunday (it is also Proper 29 in our lectionary --- the lessons are the same.)

This is the last Sunday of the liturgical year. Next week, the church will be celebrating a new year – beginning with the first Sunday in Advent.

That is why you have this gospel today --- or similar ones in other years of the three-year liturgical cycle. All point to the kingship of Christ.

You could be thinking right now? “So what?” which is always a good response to what you are hearing in a sermon.

Or you may be a bit more caustic and simply be thinking, “Big deal, who cares?” This is good – a bit edgy, but honest theological inquiry with an edge.

I think you have every right to question what we are talking about up here. After all, we are using your precious time – the least we should do is say something worthwhile.

Let me try. The Roman Catholic Church, under the leadership of Pope Pius XI, brought Christ the King Sunday into the church’s liturgical year in 1925. ‘Christ the King Sunday’ is the last Sunday in the liturgical year. In time, other Christian denominations have followed suit. Thus, throughout Christendom we will find biblical lessons today are very nearly the same – they all talk about Christ as King.

Yet, and yet, what kind of king is this? We all know what is going to happen after Jesus has this encounter with Pontius Pilate. We know that it is going to be bad for Jesus and for his followers.

“Are you the king of the Jews?” Pilate asked Jesus mockingly.

Of course Jesus must have looked far from regal as he stood before Pilate. He had been arrested the night before; his followers had deserted him. He had already been struck in the face when appearing before the high priest, and now here he was before the Roman governor, and his life was in the balance.

Jesus answers Pilate: “My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over ...”

Actually the church is trying to teach us something today about the nature of Jesus -- the nature of our Lord – or king if you prefer.

Seeing Jesus as king puts him in juxtaposition to everything we think and know about kings. Kings have power, Kings have wealth, Kings give orders and folks do what they are told. Kings expect and receive homage and deference from their subjects. Kings are always surrounded with important people – people of status and stature in the royal court.

Yet Jesus doesn't have power or wealth or military might. Jesus is not surrounded by people of status and stature; he is surrounded by little people – not important folks – in fact some of his people are among the most despised – tax collectors, prostitutes, cast-off people – not those in the mainstream of power and status.

But all his life Jesus was with folks who were on the margin, on the edge, 'iffy' people. He begins his ministry at age 30 being baptized by an itinerate preacher who was known for his fiery rhetoric and aesthetic life style. He is the one who gets himself executed for criticizing the powers that be.

Jesus then goes out and recruits fishermen and other common folks --- no one from the upper crust, no one from the aristocracy or the government, no one from “Who's Who in Roman-occupied Palestine.”

Even if Jesus wasn't a good recruiter, he was an even worse judge of character. He seemed to attract folks who were on the fringes --- people that respectable people didn't like.

He ate with tax collectors, who were really despised by Jesus' fellow citizens. He is reputed to have pronounced forgiveness

on a woman caught in adultery. He even allowed himself to be anointed by a woman who had a bad reputation.

Yet Jesus is a King – his rule is not one that is external and based in power. But rather is one that is internal to the people who follow him and is based in love.

Jesus the King is a paradox. For Jesus as King turns the values of the world upside down. It is not by might, or influence or even intelligence that this King rules – but by love.

Those of us who claim to be Christians this morning are subjects of our King – Jesus. As his subjects we are expected to always question everything in our lives by his standards of love -- and the by products of that love – justice and mercy.

So today we worship and bow before our King.

We worship Jesus Christ and today we acknowledge his kingship over all.

We worship Jesus – the one who will always make us uncomfortable with the status quo.

We worship Jesus --- the one who will always challenge our assumptions about what is good and just and right.

We worship Jesus --- the one who is always more concerned with how we treat one another than what we say about it.

We worship Jesus --- the one who confronts the motivation behind our religiosity and our ritual practice.

We worship Jesus --- the one who will support and nurture us in our vulnerability and leave us to our own devices in our arrogance.

We worship Jesus --- the one who tells us to turn the other cheek when hurt and disappointed by others.

We worship Jesus --- the one who gives all for us that we might have life and have it abundantly.

We worship Jesus, the one who says: “for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.”

And when we ask “Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry ... or thirsty...And when was it that we saw you a stranger ... or naked...And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison?”

This Jesus, the one we worship --- is the one who will say “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these ...you did it to me.”

We are called to be an instrument for the Kingdom of God – for the reign of Christ as King.

The reign of Christ the King is one in which the ‘least of these’ are cared for. The judgment of Jesus’ followers will be on their response to the ‘least of these.’

Jesus shall reign and in his kingdom we shall not be judged by our looks, our wealth, our possessions and our educational and professional accomplishments, or even our religiosity --- we

**shall be judged on how we have used all that God has given us
in the service of others.**

Therefore:

**Jesus shall reign...when you feed someone who is hungry,
or when you assuage another's thirst.**

**Jesus shall reign...when you welcome a stranger,
or when you clothe one who is in need.**

Jesus shall reign...when you visit someone who is sick.

**Jesus shall reign...when you go to one who is in trouble and in
prison.**

**Jesus shall reign when, as you walk through the doors that
take you out of this church, you imagine seeing a sign that says
– on this side just before you leave – “Service Entrance.”**

**Crown Jesus the King of your life today, you will be amazed at
what will happen!**