

Christ the King Sunday
Last Sunday of Pentecost
Thanksgiving Sunday
20 November 2022 Trinity Church

Let us pray:

As I said at the beginning, this Sunday is called many things – the last Sunday in Pentecost, thanksgiving Sunday and Christ the king or the Reign of Christ Sunday. I am going to preach about the last of these. I am preaching about Christ the King.

Christ the King Sunday is always the last Sunday before the new liturgical year, which begins with Advent, which begins next Sunday. And yet our reading for this special Sunday is the story of the Crucifixion. . . . You see what I mean about this Sunday being about lots of things. We sing Thanksgiving hymns, we talk about Christ's kingship and we read about Jesus' crucifixion.

To be honest with you, Christ the King is not the image I have of Jesus and the image is not one I use in preaching or teaching or praying. But I wanted to look at it and try to understand why it is held up at this last Sunday of the liturgical year. The scripture is the crucifixion; that's not very regal; perhaps they could have chosen a different text to talk about Christ the king: his birth perhaps- though that's not so regal either - a barn, straw, animals.

Maybe his triumphal entry into Jerusalem; but really that was a man on a donkey with people throwing coats onto the dusty roads and waving palm branches – not very regal either.

I realized none of Jesus' life story is particularly 'regal' or King-like at least in our current use of the term.

In this passage about the crucifixion Jesus is called or rather accused of being a King by the leaders, by the soldiers and even by one of his fellow 'criminals' on the cross – but it's all mocking and he's hung on a cross that has a sign that says "King of the Jews" it's all sarcasm and mockery.

What kind of king winds up on a cross at a place called the Skull?
certainly not the kings we read about in our history books.

Throughout all of history, our image of King is one with physical strength, power, conquest, wealth, thrones, crowns.

Kings compete to see who has the stronger army, the most weapons, the tightest control over resources or the largest amount of conquered territories.

So how does a king with no army, no weapons, how does a man – who has been mocked, beaten and hung on a cross fit into our image of King??????

It doesn't. He doesn't. And that's the power of this story.

Instead of a crown of gold, he wears a crown of thorns, rather than a throne, Jesus mounts a donkey and a cross

rather than a scepter and a sword, he approaches others with empty hands

rather than have people bow before him, he bows and washes their feet.

Instead of commanding a well -armed militia to instill fear, Jesus calls a straggly group of common folk to walk with him

Instead of accumulating wealth and subjects and property, Jesus encourages his followers to give it all away; to share it.

Rather than identifying various enemies and setting out to destroy them, Jesus ask his followers to love their enemies

Rather than seeing violence as they way to rule, Jesus advocates turning the other cheek

rather than bravado, Jesus recommends humility

rather than conquest – compassion

rather than competition, cooperation

rather than vengeance, love.

Who is this King?
What kind of kingdom is this?

When we recite the Lord's prayer, every Sunday, maybe every day, we say 'thy kingdom come' What is this kingdom we speak of?

Personally, I love this man/god man/man god.
This man - Jesus - who is worshipped all over the world but who never asked to be worshipped. Kings want to be worshipped. When you worship someone you set them up on a pedestal - you set them apart, . . . and then you don't have to emulate them.

Jesus never asked to be worshipped, but he did ask to be followed . . .
"follow me" he said, and, we have learned, that's a lot harder to do.

Here are a few of the distinctions between secular kingdoms and God's kingdom:

If you're a soldier in a traditional king's army, it may not be pleasant but you know what to do -
You do what you're told - go here, do this, turn around, and you do it. There are laws; there are rules; there is a hierarchy and you know your place in it.

But in Jesus' kingdom, it's less clear. We are asked to follow, not obey. This kingdom is still in the process of being built. And we are an essential part of the kingdom - building team. and there's work to be done, and We don't know what to do. We aren't necessarily told to do this, go there, turn around, it's less clear how to be obedient soldiers or good subjects in Jesus' kingdom. We have to figure a lot of it out ourselves.

Like, We know we are to forgive . . .that's not easy

We know we are supposed to love our enemies - that's really not easy

We know we are supposed to share what we have with those in need . . . and we try, especially those of us in churches, but that's not easy either.

We know we're not supposed to judge - that's very difficult , especially in these times of such division.

Jesus never said he was a king; he lived his life in complete contradiction to traditional kingship. His power was not "power - over"
His was an inner power, a "power with" .

And though he had no "power - over", he was not afraid and that's what made him most threatening to the authorities.

We wasn't afraid,
he knew who he was and whose he was,
he wasn't afraid to speak the truth
You see, fear is the main way that traditional kings hold power, that's what power-over is about
Holding people in place through fear.

We follow Jesus, if we do - -, not because he insisted we do, not because of his power, not because of fear, but because of love

We follow not because we are ordered to , not because we must but because we may.

When people ask me "do you worship Jesus?"

I would have to answer NO, But I'm trying my best of follow him"

To me, the words worship and king are not really appropriate to the Jesus that I know and read about and love. But if there is a Jesus kingdom, then I do want to be part of that.

In fact, what an honor - to be part of that kingdom wanna join me? it's easier together ; ... and we're all invited, and we all are needed.

amen

Call to Worship

Before the sunlight
before the mountains,
before birdsong
before breath,
You, maker of all, were there

You are the architect of the universe
the keeper of all time
the poet of creation,
the sower of every seed.

And we, who inhabit this world of your making
We who thrive on the harvest of the earth,
we, who also have been shaped by your hand
and raised by your love,
we, fall silent at the wonder of all that surrounds us.
(pause)

And let us read together Psalm 46 in our hymnals. Page 780