



## Christ the King Sunday Year B

### Servants of Christ the King

[RCL]: 2 Samuel 23:1-7; Psalm 132:1-13 (14-19); Revelation 1:4b-8; John 18:33-37

This sermon is being written the day after the massacre of eleven congregants of the Jewish temple in Pittsburgh. As we approach the end of our Christian year and focus on the reign of Christ the King, we ponder this event and many other events of violence and terror, the mayhem and madness that stalk our land and the people of the world: the destruction and death in Syria and the prospect of famine in Yemen are but two examples.

The collect for today prays that, “the people of the earth, divided and enslaved by sin, may be freed and brought together under his most gracious rule.” We cannot escape the awareness that this collect reminds us, that we are divided and enslaved by sin. None of us are exempt from our own complicit responsibility for the world we live in. None of us can honestly claim we bear no responsibility for the sad divisions in our nation. Our dishonesty in pointing the finger at others is graphically described by someone who said, “if you point your finger at someone else, there are three pointed toward you.”

So, how do we move forward with the banner of Christ as our King in a world that still seems to shout: “We have no king but the Emperor”?

The Gospel provides us with some direction. The dialogue between Jesus and Pilate, terse though it may be, illustrates the clashing of worldly and spiritual kingship. One is the threat of raw and absolute power with which we are all too familiar and to which we are often subjected. It is the power that has called us to war as a legitimate, but seldom necessary, solution. The other is a power that comes from disavowing the power of strength and might and turning to the power of love and redemption. The two are not compatible. We have to decide which we uphold.

Another topic in the Gospel is one very much at the center of our politics and culture today, and that is truth. Jesus tells us he came into the world to testify to the truth. “Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.” There is no lie here; there is no shading or twisting of fact. The truth is that God loves the world, all of it, and gave his only Son to redeem it from sin and death.

The Nazis firebombed the industrial city of Coventry in England during World War II. The ancient cathedral was destroyed when the fire melted the lead on the roof and caused the building to collapse. After the war, a modern cathedral was rebuilt on the site, but visitors to Coventry know that adjacent to it are the ruins of an apse in which an altar stands with a charred cross, and behind it on the wall are the words “Father, forgive.” This place is a stark experience of the two opposing powers and the hope of redemption in the new cathedral where Christ in Glory is depicted above the high altar.

Images like this can help us in a time of discomfort and dread about what is happening. And the words of Christ himself remind us that to belong to the truth means listening to his voice, which may mean tuning out the voices of others claiming to have the truth.

So, how do we live in this time as citizens of the Kingdom of Christ?

We live as people of the truth, meaning we offer ourselves as ambassadors of the Good News to everyone. This does not happen by a sheer act of will. It happens by cultivating our attitudes and behavior through regular worship, the reading and study of Scripture, and our prayers. The more we feed from these sources, the more truthful our lives become, and less vulnerable to falsehood.

We live as servants of Christ the King. That means we find ways to serve him by serving others both within and without our faith community. If we think we can't do that because of our limitations or fears, then we need to ask Jesus to show us what we can do. These actions replenish our depleted resolve and strengthen us for living in a chaotic world.

We live as a people who see opportunity in the community of others. This includes embracing the stranger, the refugee and the homeless, those who have no helper. Just singling out one person in these categories and finding ways to help them are ways to honor Christ the King.

We live as a people who hope in the life of the world to come. That doesn't mean we discount this world altogether. It is God's creation, given to us for our joy and benefit. But we know it is not where we are destined. Our hearts are restless as we await what is to come. Next Sunday, we begin a new church year and the season of Advent. As we sing, "O come, O come, Emmanuel," we are challenged to bring that coming closer with our hearts and minds and strength.

The people of Coventry saw their cathedral rise out of the ashes. They began a ministry of reconciliation, the Cross of Nails, now known around the world, as a vibrant mission of reconciliation and redemption. That vision calls us today to be people of hope and reconciliation, to pray and work for civil discourse and grace towards our neighbors, and especially those who differ from us.

Here is a story that you may have heard. It is a legend from the Cherokee people that has been quoted recently by many:

*An old Cherokee is teaching his grandson about life. "A fight is going on inside me," he said to the boy. "It is a terrible fight and it is between two wolves. One is evil – he is anger, envy, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, superiority, and ego."*

*He continued, "The other is good – he is joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion, and faith. The same fight is going on inside you – and inside every other person, too."*

*The grandson thought about it for a minute and then asked his grandfather, "Which wolf will win?"*

*The old Cherokee simply replied, "The one you feed."*

As we honor Christ the King today, remember that Jesus is relying on us to be partners with him in bringing the truth to a world that tries to shut it out, but desperately needs to hear it and embrace it. Amen.

*Ben Helmer is a retired Episcopal priest who served small congregations in Kansas, Michigan, Missouri and Arkansas. He was officer for rural and small community ministries for the Episcopal Church from 1999-2005. Helmer currently lives in Holiday Island, Arkansas with his wife.*