



## SERMONS THAT WORK

### **Christ the King Sunday Proper 29 (C)**

#### **Our King**

**[RCL] Jeremiah 23:1-6; Canticle 16; Colossians 1:11-20; Luke 23:33-43**

Today, as we celebrate Christ the King, we witness strong-man authoritarians who aspire to be kings espousing nationalist, white-supremacist, anti-immigration, anti-LGBTQ, and anti-democratic policies rise up across the world and right here in the United States. In 1925, as the world was being gripped by similar nationalist, secularist, anti-Semitic, authoritarian, fascist dictators, Pope Pius XI instituted Christ the King Sunday to refocus us on why we are here – to be icons of God’s love in this world. Originally set as the last Sunday of October, Pope Paul VI moved it to the Last Sunday before Advent and called it, “The Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe.”

Christ the King is a title that strikes a peculiar tension since any and all descriptions of Jesus thankfully bear little or no resemblance to the kinds of earthly leaders and kings Jeremiah condemns in no uncertain terms: “Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! says the Lord. Therefore thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, concerning the shepherds who shepherd my people: It is you who have scattered my flock and have driven them away, and you have not attended to them. So I will attend to you for your evil doings, says the Lord” (Jeremiah 23:1-6). Jesus has none of the trappings of these wicked shepherds; Christ does not destroy, scatter and divide. Rather, our Jesus heals, repairs, gathers, and unites everyone and everything.

We look at him today, as he hangs on a Roman cross, condemned by the authoritarian regime of Caesar, still offering God’s love and compassion to another so condemned. Mocked by the empire as a so-called king, Jesus exhibits the characteristics of a true king anointed by God. When asked by another so condemned, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” He replied, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.” (Luke 23:42-43).

Writing in the aftermath of World War I, Pius noted that while there had been a cessation of hostilities, there was no true peace. He deplored the rise of class divisions and unbridled nationalism and held that true peace can only be found under the Kingship of Christ as “Prince of Peace”. He wrote, “Jesus Christ reigns over the minds of individuals by His teachings, in their hearts by His love, in each one's life by the living according to His law and the imitating of His example.” Pius XI wanted this feast to inspire the laity, saying, “The faithful, moreover, by meditating upon these truths, will gain much strength and courage,

enabling them to form their lives after the true Christian ideal... He must reign in our minds... in our wills... in our hearts... in our bodies and in our members, which should serve as instruments for the interior sanctification of our souls, or to use the words of the Apostle Paul, as instruments of justice unto God.”

Given the state of the world today, it still seems like a justifiable feast to observe and to ponder just what sort of king Jesus is – “is” being the operant word as the Christ was, is, and ever shall be. When one enters the Bath Abbey in Bath, England, one can find a simple brochure that offers this answer to this central question of faith – “What kind of king is Jesus?”

“Jesus was born in an obscure Middle Eastern town called Bethlehem, over 2000 years ago. During his first 30 years, he shared the daily life and work of an ordinary home. For the next three years, he went about teaching people about God and healing sick people by the shores of Lake Galilee. He called 12 ordinary men to be his helpers.

“He had no money. He wrote no books. He commanded no army. He wielded no political power. During his life, he never travelled more than 200 miles in any direction. He was executed by being nailed to a cross at the age of 33.

“Today, nearly 2 billion people throughout the world worship Jesus as divine - the Son of God. Their experience has convinced them that in the wonders of nature we see God as our loving Father; in the person of Jesus, we discover God as Son; and in our daily lives, we encounter this same God as Spirit. Jesus is our way to finding God: we learn about Jesus by reading the Bible, particularly the New Testament and we meet him directly in our spiritual experience.

“Jesus taught us to trust in a loving and merciful Father and to pray to him in faith for all our needs. He taught that we are all infinitely precious, children of one heavenly Father, and that we should therefore treat one another with love, respect, and forgiveness. He lived out what he taught by caring for those he met; by healing the sick - a sign of God's love at work; and by forgiving those who put him to death.

“Jesus' actions alone would not have led him to a criminal's death on the cross: but his teaching challenged the religious and moral beliefs of his day. People believed, and do to this day, that **he can lead us to a full experience of God's love and compassion.** Above all, he pointed to his death as God's appointed means of bringing self-centered people back to God. Jesus also foretold that he would be raised to life again three days after his death. When, three days after he had died on the cross, his followers did indeed meet him alive again; frightened and defeated women and men became fearless and joyful messengers.

“Their message of the Good News about Jesus is the reason Bath Abbey exists. More importantly, it is the reason why all over the world there are Christians who know what it means to meet the living Jesus, and

believe that He can lead us all to heal and repair a broken world. May your time in Bath Abbey be a blessing to you, and also to us in the church.”<sup>1</sup>

This is why the Church is here at all: to follow Jesus; to heal, gather, repair, restore, and unite everyone and everything. To be a blessing to all the earth, and everything therein.

May God for us, whom we call Father, God alongside us, whom we call Son, and God within us, whom we call Spirit, hold and enliven us to a full experience of God’s love and compassion; that in all that is, seen and unseen, we may testify to Your Truth as a community of Love, Justice, and Freedom for all peoples, all creatures, and all the Earth, which You have given us to tend and preserve as Your Creation. Amen.

***The Rev. Kirk Alan Kubicek** is currently Priest in Charge at Christ Church, Rock Spring Parish, Forest Hill, Md. Christ Church is a Small but Mighty parish, and together we are rediscovering what our Lord has in store for our future. He has spent over 35 years in Parish Ministry in all shapes and size parishes, and for 15 years worked with The Episcopal Church Office of Stewardship and TENS. He often uses storytelling, music, and guitar in proclaiming the Good News. Married with three adult children and one grandson, Kirk also plays drums in On The Bus, a DC Metro Area Grateful Dead tribute band. All shall be well, all shall be well, all manner of thing shall be well!*

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<sup>1</sup> Used by permission with thanks.