

Ez 34:11-16, 20-24, Eph 1:15-23, MT 25:31-46
Christ the King A
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Christ's Reign

I hope everyone had a joy-filled time with family and friends during the Thanksgiving holiday. In our house, it's always wonderful, if a bit frantic, to have everyone gathered, children and grandchildren, all of us boisterously trying to simultaneously catching up with each other. And part of the joy of being grandparents, it that it's also lovely to return to the quiet as everyone heads back to their routine lives.

Today is our final Sunday of our liturgical year, the Last Sunday after the Pentecost, and a day when we celebrate the Feast of Christ the King.

While I was in seminary, I had one professor who was NOT a fan of this feast day. She'd explain that first off, this is a relatively new practice in our church tradition. It didn't begin until 1925, so wasn't one of the more traditional days celebrating an event in Jesus' life or in the formation of the church. And she didn't particularly like why this feast day originated. If you recall your world history, the early 1920's were just prior to the beginning to WWII. In Europe, this was the time of increasing secularization with a dramatic rise of nationalist feelings and authoritarian regimes. In reaction to this societal shift and concern with the political tides, the Church sought to slow the cultural divisiveness by encouraging God's people to focus instead on a vision of the all-embracing authority of Christ.

Perhaps by focusing on Christ as the true King, above all worldly kings, God's people could recognize a different kind power. Perhaps by recognizing that the Kingdom of Christ has already begun here on this earth through Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension, humanity could be encouraged to step away from that growing fear and hatred of one another and instead seek first the peace of Christ.

For my professor, the idea of pushing through a feast day because of troubling events in the world was unnecessary — especially since, for every generation, there are always troubling events in the world. I wasn't particularly convinced by her concerns, but I did wonder whether we, as Americans, could really appreciate the idea of Christ's kingship. After all, we haven't had to deal with a monarchy since our nation's infancy. And although we may be fascinated by English royalty, we're much more in tune with our own form of government. Can we today, really embrace the concept of living our lives under one supreme authority? Now *that* could be challenging!

But Christ's version of authority is like no other, for here we find a power above all creation, a Ruler of All whose power is so great that we cannot even gaze at his face in all its glory. Yet within the All-Powerful Christ is a God-sized love that is beyond the reach our understanding, for Jesus is also a friend who is with us always, in our times of joy and our greatest sorrows. How do we wrap our minds around the mystery of God who enfolds these two seemingly divergent realities?

We see both of these perspectives in our readings today. Paul's letter to the Ephesians points to God's reign being fulfilled in Christ. Christ is above all, above every name that is named in all the ages. Paul prods us to realize that regardless of whether you're talking about political structures, or spiritual dimensions, or any part of creation, Jesus is the essence of

completeness, of fullness — the one who fills in all the empty spaces — for everything that can be filled, is filled by him. Paul stretches our sacred imagination towards a view of Jesus who is beyond our earthly limitations of time and space: the Holy One who was and is and is to come. See who our Lord Jesus Christ really is: the Almighty, the Powerful Creator, who has the authority, the ability, to hold all the stars of all the galaxies in the palm of his hand,

And yet, the Almighty and Powerful One loves us, each one of us, eternally and always. In the words of the prophet, Ezekiel, we hear that God's kingdom is one of flourishing, for our Lord God is the shepherd of the sheep, and the loving shepherd will seek the lost, bring back those who've strayed, bind up the injured, and strengthen the weak. God's kingdom is one of hope and justice and flourishing, where we are lovingly invited to come together as one with God.

Unlike any earthly ruler who prioritizes taking care of the insiders— the rich, the powerful, those with the right credentials, those who belong — in God's kingdom, the lost, the weak, and the marginalized are seen, are found, and are gathered up into God's tender care. Jesus, the King of kings, ushers in a kingdom unlike any other, a kingdom without bounds,

We're all aware that today we live in a divisive world. You can't plug into anything without hearing the clamor encouraging us to divide into tribes and categorize those around us into who's in and who's out. But that has always been the way of the world. We naturally divide ourselves into sheep and goats, ironically always looking at ourselves as sheep and those others as goats. Being human, it can be a stretch to recognize the us in them.

But what does Jesus teach us? In Matthew's gospel we hear Jesus pushing us to understand how he sees us — the truth that we really are all one. The only actual difference between the sheep and the goats is that the sheep strive to live lives filled by Christ through acts of compassion and love towards ALL...both the sheep and the goats. Everyone. For we all are God's creation, made in God's image. We're all asked to join together in community to care for one another, helping those we encounter to flourish — regardless of their race, religion, gender, sexuality or economic status, whether they're prisoners or immigrants or refugees. Jesus turns the idea of insiders upside down by encouraging his followers to care for those who have been separated and turned away...those who have been designated by us, not God, as goats. And those of us who neglect the other, will face judgment.

Why do we celebrate the Feast of Christ the King? To show us the better way, Jesus' way.

Christ shows us the truth of the Cross, helping us to see what true authority looks like, as our All powerful Savior willingly sacrifices himself for us — for all of us — out of love. Even at the time of his great suffering and death, Jesus willingly forgives us. Christ the King invites us to share in the truth of his kingdom, asks us step away from our divisive sheep-and-goat mentality, by encouraging us to care for one another, for all are God's beloved creation.

With God's help, we can begin to see one another through the light of Christ's love. With God's help, we can follow Christ the King, who is the path to God's peace.

Let us pray together once again, the words of today's collect found in your bulletin. It's a beautiful prayer asking for God's help in our divisive world:

Almighty and everlasting God, whose will it is to restore all things in your well-beloved Son, the King of kings and Lord of lords: Mercifully grant that the peoples of the earth, divided and enslaved by sin, may be freed and brought together under his most gracious rule; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

And Amen.