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Christ the King B: 2 Samuel 23:1-7, Psalm, 93, Revelation 1:4b-8, John 18:33-37

“Do what ever he tells you and let the Kingdom come”

In the name of the father and of the son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

How many times have we all prayed: Your kingdom come? But what is this Kingdom all about? What kind of king rules? While we might say it is obvious that it is God's kingdom, I think we would have to be honest and say that what the Kingdom is is not easy to answer. It is not helped either by the fact that we are uneasy with the language of Kingship. As I look back over all the things I know or have heard about Kings I cannot think of too many that were ‘good’ Kings. In the long story of the Kings of Israel and Judah only a few were ever considered by the writers, ‘good’. Most were considered corrupt and ‘did what was evil in the Lords sight”. Earthly power seems to corrupt even the best of men and women. We are rightly skeptical and nervous about those who wield power, which is why our democracy theoretically has numerous checks and balances in place.

Pilate was confused as well about the notion of Kingship, for a king in his thinking meant power and grandeur, not a humble, poor teacher. There is Jesus standing before Pilate and something in this picture just didn't seem right. Now, we should not be surprised at the lack of understanding of who Jesus was. John opened his Gospel with a statement that his own knew him not. And after 20 centuries and literally millions of church services and sermons, do we really know either?

Vital to how we answer the question is the realization that our commitments make us who we are. What we focus on in the depths of our being, in our minds and in our body determine what actions we will take and how we are perceived by others. When we pray for the coming of a kingdom, what kind of king are we praying for?

What kind of king do we worship? The last Sunday in the liturgical year is designated as the Festival of Christ the King or the Reign of Christ. This is not an ancient festival

like Easter or Christmas. In fact, it is less than a century old. Europe was in chaos. Inflation was rampant, and colonialism was at its worst. Atheistic communism and philosophical nihilism were on the rise.

The seeds of evil that were to produce the terror of the Holocaust and World War II were being planted. Against all this chaos and evil, the Pope established the Festival of Christ the King to declare that Jesus Christ is king. The feast was meant to remind humanity that Christ is the goal of all human history, the joy of all who hear, and the fulfillment of our aspirations.

Today, all around us, the world is already getting ready for the Christmas season. Stores have been decorated for weeks, and we are busy making plans. It is very easy to forget what Christmas is actually all about. So this last Sunday of the year before we begin the formal preparation for Christmas reminds us that we have more than tinsel and presents, mad shopping and endless stress, more even than the baby Jesus of Christmas. We have a sovereign Christ. When we know what kind of king we have, we can sing with great faith, "Joy to the world, the Lord is come. Let earth receive her king."

Today then we celebrate the reign of Christ the king. Jesus both announces and exercises the eternal reign of God. Yet who is listening to him? We tend to be like Pilate verbally sparring with Jesus. "What kind of king are you after all? And by the way, what is truth anyway? No one believes in such things any longer." So the witness is not heard, and we wonder why our vision of the future is not clear and why we so easily lose hope.

Jesus said of the Kingdom that it was in each and every one of us. It is a condition of the heart. It is something we are pointed towards in ourselves. God's kingly will is being done in various odd ways among us even at this moment; the kingdom has come already. Christians have often looked for the kingdom in world events and headlines, but first we must find Christ the King in our hearts.

The challenge of the kingdom is for each of us

To let God be God...in us
To let God be God...in our church
To let God be God...in our neighborhood
To let God be God...in our job, in our family, and
...in our world.

In its simplest terms, the kingdom of God that Jesus announced and embodied is what life would be like on earth, here and now, if God were king and the rulers of this world were not. Just imagine if God ruled the nations, and not Blair, or Bush, or Putin, or Kim Jong-il, or Hussein. Every aspect of personal and communal life would experience a radical reversal. The political, economic, and social subversions would be almost endless—peace-making instead of war mongering, liberation not exploitation, sacrifice rather than subjugation, mercy not vengeance, care for the vulnerable instead of privileges for the powerful, generosity instead of greed, humility rather than hubris, embrace rather than exclusion, etc. The ancient Hebrews had that marvelous word for this, *shalom*, or human well-being.

What is the way to this Kingdom, this place of shalom and well-being? Mary, the mother of Jesus, gave a one-line sermon to the attendants at the wedding feast who ran out of wine, she said, "Do whatever he tells you." That is what we need stamped on our morning cups of coffee to be reminded that to find meaning, purpose, and peace, the shalom of God, we must keep asking ourselves, "What is Jesus telling me to do with my life?" When we do ask and listen for the answer, then we are experiencing the power of his kingdom in our midst.

Finally we need to take note that while we call this day Christ the King Sunday, it is also 'Christ the King under arrest and being interrogated Sunday.' It is Christ the King being held hostage Sunday. It is Christ the royal political prisoner Sunday. It is Christ the King soon to be beaten and crucified Sunday. It is Christ the innocent King/Victim Sunday. It is not Christ the powerful King Sunday. It is not Christ the mighty warrior Sunday. It is not Christ the King as Lawgiver and dispenser of punishment Sunday. It is Christ, whose kingdom is not of the world or of violence or earthly power.

When we celebrate the Eucharist we tell the story of Christ who suffered a violent death to show us the way to freedom and new life. It is not a statement of triumphant belief but a humble prayer of thanksgiving and praise to the one who was, who is and is to come, who lives in our hearts right now and if we let him, guides us towards living out the Kingdom of God. Amen.