

Sermon for Christ the King Sunday 2023  
St. Anne Episcopal Church

Crown Him with many crowns,  
The Lamb upon His throne,  
Hark how the heavenly anthem drowns  
All music but its own!  
Awake, my soul and sing  
Of Him who died for thee  
And hail Him as thy matchless King  
Thru all eternity.

When I say, “Christ the King Sunday”, what do you think of? What images pop into your mind? Don’t worry, it’s not a pop quiz. No wrong answers or low grades.

On Christ the King Sunday, we sing rousing songs of triumph, a grand last hurrah before entering the more quiet, more contemplative preparatory period of Advent.

This last Sunday in Ordinary time, the season after Pentecost, is traditionally a celebratory one. We put the white frontal on the altar. We play joyous songs. I get to wear my white butterfly stole. And sermons often focus on the wonders, the majesty of heaven, where Christ sits enthroned in glory.

Maybe you can picture it—a golden throne with Jesus, dressed all in white, seated on a platform, staring into the distance, looking regal. Angels floating in the air, some with trumpets, some with harps, some singing, always in rhythm, always in tune, never a wrong note. The disciples standing around the throne, maybe jockeying for position, as each one tries to get into the place of honor at Christ’s right hand. And throngs, great big crowds, of believers, out in front, waiting for words of wisdom to come forth. A time of peace. A time of celebration. A time of triumph, when sin has been destroyed, death has been vanquished, no more sorrow, no more tears, just one unending period of joy. The Kingdom of God, heaven, with Jesus in charge.

Sounds good, doesn’t it. This is a traditional, an orthodox view, of Christ the King Sunday, one that delivers joy and hope for the future.

However, I’d like to remind us all of something. The lectionary for Ordinary time in Year A is sometimes referred to as the season of parables. We’ve had a whole lot of them over the last few months—the parable of the sower, the parable of the mustard seed, the parable of the leaven, the parable of the talents, the parable of the landowner, the parable of the wise and foolish bridesmaids, and so on. You get the picture. The interesting thing, and something that is often overlooked, is that these parables begin with some variation on the phrase, “The Kingdom of God (or the Kingdom of Heaven) is like this.”

And yes, parables are not meant to be taken literally. They are stories that are used to make a point, to reveal a truth (usually an uncomfortable truth), to get us thinking about something in a new way, to see something that may have been right in front of our noses but that we haven't seen before. So, the Kingdom of God is not really a mustard seed or a bit of yeast. Still, Jesus spent a lot of time talking about the Kingdom of God, and the authors of the Gospels thought these lessons were important enough to write them down.

What can we learn about the Kingdom of God from these parables? One thing that all these parables have in common is that they are very earthly. They are very practical. They deal with life situations in Jesus' day. And the lessons we take from them, on justice, on readiness, on mission, these are lessons we apply to the here and now, to our lives today.

So, this Kingdom of God, this Kingdom of Heaven that Jesus talks about so extensively, it's a bit different from the one we tend to celebrate on Christ the King Sunday. No thrones. No angels. No songs. Just a lot of rather confusing stories, some of which make us very uncomfortable, about how we should live our lives and how we should treat each other. A bit confusing, isn't it?

And here's another puzzler, we Americans don't have a king, or a queen, or a monarch of any kind. In fact, we're about as anti-monarchy as a country can get. We fought a revolutionary war to be free of kings, we threw tea into the harbor, wrote a declaration of independence, and set up a completely different type of government, one in which there is no king, but rather a government of the people, by the people, for the people.

So maybe, this image of Christ the King Sunday, a fairly recent celebration, started in 1925 by a European Roman Catholic Pope, Pius XI, maybe this isn't the best image for us. Let's engage our sacred imaginations a bit. Let's think of an image that is more American, that brings this idea of Christ the King into the here and now of our lives, that incorporates these parables a bit more. Instead of celebrating Christ the King Sunday, what would it look like if we celebrated Christ the President Sunday instead.

Think about it, what would our world be like if, instead of distant visions of Christ enthroned on high, we thought about Christ as the leader, the head of government, in our system, in our world today.

What do you think Jesus' platform would look like, if He were president? What would His health care policies look like? Remember, this is a man who spent much of his professional life healing those who came to him, regardless of their position, regardless of their ability to pay. His only criteria for healing was that the person be in need, and that they (or someone from their family) come to him and ask for help. Think about it. What would a healthcare system designed by Jesus look like?

And what about food security? What do you think Jesus' food and agricultural policies would look like? Jesus, the man who repeatedly fed the hungry, who encouraged his

followers to provide food for widows and orphans, who broke bread and shared it with those around him. How would Jesus deal with food insecurity?

What would Jesus' economic policies look like? That's a challenging one. Yes, Jesus regularly called out the unjust practices of the rich, those practices that impoverished and held down so many of those around him. And Jesus also told the rich young man to sell all his goods and give the proceeds to the poor.

And what about labor relations, about wage policies? We just had the parable of the landowner who paid all the workers a living daily wage, those who worked the full day, those who worked a half day, and even those who only worked a couple of hours—they all got a full day's pay. Imagine what a wage policy would look like if Jesus were in charge of writing it?

And something that is dear to my heart, what would our immigration policy look like if Jesus were in charge? How would we be treating migrants, asylum seekers, refugees?

Now, I want to be very clear—I am not advocating for any particular policy or political party here. Rather, I am asking you to think about what our world would look like if we tried to implement, to actually live out, those priorities that Jesus gave us. To feed the hungry. To care for the weak. To love our neighbors, all our neighbors, as we love ourselves. What would our world be if Jesus were the President, the King, the head of State?

Mother Grethe shared with us once that she tries to end each sermon with an ask, something that each of us can take home and think on, act on, during the week. So, in line with Mother Grethe's wise guidance, here's my ask for you today. I'd like each of you to spend a bit of time thinking about one area that is important to you, that touches your heart. For some, it may be challenges around housing, for others, education. Perhaps your passion is healthcare, or mental health, or addiction issues. Or maybe what gets your blood pumping is economic justice or racial discrimination, creation care or taking care of kids. And in that area that tugs at your heart strings, that calls out to you, in that area, I'd ask that you take one action this week. It doesn't have to be big. It doesn't have to be earthshattering or lifechanging. Write a letter. Say a prayer. Do some research and educate yourself on an issue. Volunteer. Find some way to push our current world a little more in the direction of the way Jesus intends for us to live, a little closer to the wonderful, joyous, peaceful place Jesus wants us to experience. Let's celebrate Christ the King Sunday by making our world a bit more like the Kingdom of God. Amen.