

Ann Murray
Year B
Christ the King
11/24/2024

Here we are, firmly planted in the whirlwind of the commercial holiday season. Thanksgiving is just around the corner, with Black Friday deals clamoring for our attention. Yet, more importantly, we are poised on the threshold of Advent—a season of anticipation and hope. But today is not about Advent just yet. Today, we observe Christ the King Sunday, the final Sunday in the liturgical calendar, marking the conclusion of Ordinary Time.

It is a peculiar juxtaposition, then, that the Gospel reading doesn't lead us forward into Advent but instead pulls us back into Holy Week. We find ourselves in the midst of a tense conversation between Pilate and Jesus—a moment charged with significance as it occurs within the Passion narrative.

Pilate's question takes center stage: "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus doesn't offer a straightforward answer but responds with a probing question of his own: "Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?" Pilate sidesteps, redirecting the conversation to what Jesus has done to provoke such hostility from the religious leaders.

In this exchange, Jesus acknowledges a kingdom—but a kingdom not of this world. He makes it clear that his reign does not conform to Pilate's or the world's understanding of power. If it

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were, his followers would be fighting to prevent his arrest. Instead, they have scattered in fear. Peter has already denied him three times. Here stands Jesus, a seemingly powerless figure, hardly resembling an earthly king.

Yet, Jesus declares that he has come to testify to the truth. And here is the crux of Christ's kingship: he embodies and reveals the truth of God's kingdom—a kingdom built not on domination but on love, justice, and reconciliation.

What is this truth? At its heart, it is simple yet profound. As Jesus once told a scribe who asked about the greatest commandment: "The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these."

This is the truth Jesus testifies to—a truth that calls us to reorient our lives toward God and neighbor. It is a truth that demands we live into the love God has for us.

The Challenge of Christ's Kingship

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What might our lives look like if we followed Christ the King and aligned ourselves with this truth? It's a question that invites us to examine how we live daily.

First, **Love God Fully**

To follow Christ is to acknowledge that God is God, and we are not. This love is not merely an emotion but a posture of trust, dependence, and devotion. Think of the Psalmist's words: "*O taste and see that the Lord is good; happy are those who take refuge in him!*" Loving God fully means seeing everything we have and are as a gift from God.

For instance, consider the practice of Sabbath, which we are going to learn about during Advent. In our hurried world, observing a day of rest can feel impossible. Yet Sabbath is a profound way of declaring our dependence on God, not on our productivity. It is a way of loving God with our time, trusting that God sustains us even when we pause.

Second, **Love Our Neighbors as Ourselves**

Here is where the rubber meets the road. Loving our neighbors is not a theoretical exercise; it is a radical and practical call to action.

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What does it mean to love the neighbor who votes differently than you? Or the one who hurt you deeply? Loving our neighbors means seeing them as God does—not through the lens of their shortcomings but as beloved children of God.

In a time of division—political, social, and even personal—we have much work to do. We are called to be repairers of the breach, bridging divides instead of widening them. Consider what this might look like in our own congregation: Are there opportunities to reach out to someone who feels isolated or marginalized? Well, our Outreach Committee does much of this work by feeding the unhoused and facilitating at Laundry Love. We welcome anyone to join us in these endeavors and encourage you to bring your ideas for other outreach opportunities to the committee.

Living the Truth in Community

Living as citizens of God's kingdom is not a solitary endeavor. It requires community. Jesus' kingship is not an individual relationship; it is communal, encompassing all who bear his name.

As Episcopalians, our Baptismal Covenant reminds us of this communal responsibility:

- To seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbors as ourselves.
- To strive for justice and peace among all people and respect the dignity of every human being.

These are not abstract ideals but concrete commitments. This might mean helping to fill up the little food pantries around Norman, offering a listening ear to someone in pain, or standing up for justice when it is uncomfortable.

A Kingdom of Grace, Not Force

Finally, Christ the King Sunday reminds us that Jesus' kingdom is not of this world. It does not advance through power or force but through grace and love.

Think of the parable of the mustard seed—a tiny seed that grows into a great shrub, providing shelter for the birds. God's kingdom grows not through grand gestures but through small acts of faithfulness. When we choose kindness over retaliation, generosity over greed, or compassion over indifference, we plant seeds of the kingdom.

Christ's Call to Us

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On this Christ the King Sunday, let us recommit ourselves to living as citizens of God's kingdom. Let us embrace the truth that Jesus testifies to—the truth of God's unending love and the call to love God and neighbor with our whole being.

We can empathize.

We can listen.

We can love.

And in doing so, we proclaim the reign of Christ our King—a reign not of power and might but of grace, compassion, and reconciliation.

Let us live into this truth, for the glory of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

AMEN.