

Last Sunday after Pentecost ~Year B ~ Christ the King Sunday
Saint Paul's Episcopal Church
November 25, 2006

Christ the King Reigns

Lessons for the Day

- Daniel 7: 9-14
- Psalm 93
- Revelation 1:1-8
- Mark 11:1-11

Homily

I greet you in the name of **God our Creator, Christ our Brother**, and the **Holy Spirit** who sustains and sanctifies us, empowering us to love and to serve both God and Christ.

Amen.

Today is Christ the King Sunday -- the New Year's Eve of the Christian Calendar. Today is the day when we reflect back on the joyful journey from Advent through Christmas to Epiphany. It is the day we recall the slow, sad march from Ash Wednesday through Lent to the despair of Good Friday. It is the day we recall the triumph of Easter and the gift of the Holy Spirit to the church at Pentecost.

Today we remember all the days and weeks following Pentecost -- the days of *ordinary time* -- that lead up to today, the Sunday of Christ the King. **Today is a day we are reminded -- because we all need reminding -- that Christ is not only the Lord of our lives, but ruler of the universe and of all that was, all that is, and all that is to come.**

"**Christ the King**" Sunday. How quaint, you might think, as I indeed thought when I began to reflect on these lessons. We **don't have much experience with royalty** here in the United States. And most of the royals we do see on the world stage are domesticated almost to the point of parody -- trotted out for ceremonial occasions, but otherwise consigned to the tabloids as they decry their own -- and their kinfolk's -- poor choices in husbands, wives, lovers and diversions.

This twentieth-century Kingship is life in a fishbowl. And it is a life few of us -- even those of us with delusions of grandeur -- would want. The **examples we see in modern life strip "Kingship" of all its power** and majesty.

Too Bad for us -- we **lose something when we give up the regal dimension of our God-understanding.**

Kingship, enthronement, royal processions and judgment by a regent of some sort are threads that run through the warp and woof of the great tapestry that is our Christian Bible. They are certainly **themes everywhere evident in today's lessons.**

The entirety of **Psalm 93** is a **paean to the Lord as king**. In fact, this **psalm is known as one of the "enthronement" psalms**. Psalm 93 begins with a description of a "king . . . robed in majesty". The language is

rapid, condensed, and forceful* -- almost like thunder -- and concludes less than eighty words later with praise of the Lord because the Lord's decrees/laws are reliable.

* Carroll Stuhlmueller in *Harpers Bible Commentary*, page 477

Now **this** is a King to throw in with -- this is not some tabloid figurehead, trying to keep his or her children from siring heirs with everyone in sight. This is a King to obey, a King in whom we could seek refuge.

Or **consider our lesson from the vision of the prophet Daniel** -- thrones are set in place and flames issue forth. "The Ancient One" takes the throne and the court sits in judgment and the books are opened. And one like a human comes from the clouds. And the text tells us:

"To him was given dominion and glory and kingship, that all peoples, nations and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, and his kingdom is one that shall never be destroyed."

Daniel 7:14 (NRSV)

So what, you might ask? It is a fair question, and I promise to deal with it in a moment. Suffice it for now to say just this: If you believe any of this Bible stuff at all, the whole story seems to have much to do with a King. And the King -- whatever else the King does or is -- is powerful and majestic and prone to evaluate our obedience or lack thereof.

For now, let's reflect briefly on the balance of today's lessons.

The Gospel of **Mark gives us the familiar story of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem** on the Sunday before the crucifixion. We remember this as "Palm Sunday" but Mark recounts no palm branches waving. *What Mark does have* is **two things that bring us back to our study of Kingship**. First, cloaks and leafy branches are spread out on the road -- evoking Israel's royal processions. Clearly, those around him see in Jesus something worthy of laud and honor. Beyond that, though, they run ahead of Jesus -- crying out:

**"Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!
Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!
Hosanna in the highest heaven!"**

Mark 11:9b,10 (NRSV)

And here is an **unfamiliar word: "Hosanna."** Whatever in the world could it; however in the world does it tie in to Kingship? I always assumed *Hosanna* just meant "Hallelujah" or "Alright" or -- in today's parlance "You da man!"

Actually, the word ***Hosanna* means much, much more**. In today's Gospel, the word ***Hosanna* means "Save now" or "Save, I pray!"** And who -- above all others -- has the power of life and death over subjects? Who, indeed, can save? The king can save, that's who. Christ the King can save!

Finally, in **The Revelation to John** we find echoes of Kingship woven throughout today's text: the seven spirits are before the **throne**, and Jesus is spoken of as "the firstborn from the dead and the **ruler of the kings of the earth**". We are given to understand that we are "to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father."

And then -- in the last verse of the last lesson of the last Sunday in the Church year -- we hear about the King in whom we have put our trust:

"I am the Alpha and the Omega," say the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty."

Revelation 1:8 (NRSV)

1. It's Christ the King Sunday. **So what?**

Here's what: Think about the world you left to come to this worship service, and the world you will re-enter when you leave this place. It is a world that fairly shouts: "**This is all there is!** *Get as much as you can, as fast as you can, because it will all be over in a twinkling.*"

And you know better. You know that there is far more to life than meets the eye. You know that **the Christ of Psalm Sunday is part of the Godhead of Revelation:** "the Alpha and the Omega . . . who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty."

Nations rise and fall. As hard as it is to believe, a day will come when there is no Old Glory flying over a country called the United States of America. The sun has set on the British Empire; it will set on the United States. But our **God is forever.** We have been grafted into eternal life by our belief in Christ the King. Our God is "the Alpha and the Omega . . . who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty."

2. It's Christ the King Sunday. **So what?**

Here's what: Think about the streams of religious thought afoot in the world. There are **Gods you can't please**, and **Gods that require nothing at all.** The Gods you can't please yield anxious striving from their devotees; the Gods who require nothing, yield nothing and get nothing.

But we know better. We live daily the story of Christ the King, *a different kind of King* who -- as Revelation tells us in today's lesson -- "freed us from his sins by his blood and made us to be a Kingdom, priests serving his God and Father . . ." Revelation 1:5b, 6a (NRSV)

Here is a God who requires everything and then -- finding us unable to give what is asked -- gives himself up for us. "Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me!"

3. It's Christ the King Sunday. **So what?**

Here's what (and this is Big Stuff!): You and I (and all those who believe in Christ) are heirs of Christ the King. It is, admittedly, a **different kind of Kingship.** A Kingship where the first are last, the last are first and the meek inherit the earth. And it is a kingship that never dies -- one that issues forth first into a life of service and humility and sacrifice and love, and then into an eternal life of praise and thanksgiving.

There is no "ordinary time" for us as children of Christ the King. Every day is an **extraordinary opportunity** to **claim our heritage** and to **speak love into hate, bring joy into sorrow, work peace where there is discord.** There is no ordinary time because we have thrown in with an extraordinary God, with Christ the King!

So . . . claim your royal lineage! Go forth from here as child of the King to proclaim God's love and God's light to a dark and loveless world.

Christ the King reigns -- now and forever more.

Amen.