

Sermon 26 Pentecost (A) proper 29

Nov 26 2029

**CHRIST THE KING**

Rev. Betsy W Sentigar

Christ Episcopal Church

Towanda, Pa. 18848

1. Today we celebrate Christ the King Sunday. It is relatively a newer celebration as recent as 1925 as a result of Pope Pious XII encyclical to the Roman Catholic Church and the churches oppression around the world specifically to Mexico who at that time was 90% Catholic. politicians and leaders outlawed any expression of the faith.

When Pius became pope in 1922, Europe was still reeling from the ravages of the first world war and its aftermath. He believed that secularism and nationalism had caused the people and nations of Europe to abandon Jesus Christ and his holy laws he believed that only the restoration of the empire of our lord in other words the rule of Christ could bring true and lasting peace.

Even though the influence of Christianity and western society was already waning, Pius XI appears to have been confident that the church had the ability to reverse its decline. In retrospect the good intentions of this pope and his confidence that 'The Peace of Christ in the Kingdom of Christ' come about in the way he envisioned seemed naive. (For me, I envision the disciples feeling similarly.) He died early in 1939 the very year the second world war broke out.

The solemnity of Christ the King Sunday remains a celebration in Roman Catholic, Anglican, Episcopalian and other Protestant churches to this day. What does it mean to say or to believe that Christ is King? In this homily I want explore with you how to understand its relevance for our spiritual journeys. in trying to answer that question it's easy to think of the kingship of Christ in terms of the authority and power wielded by

emperors, kings, military leaders or other secular strong men that we know from our study of history.

Such men, and they are almost always men, had power to use force to control to impose, to dominate, and often to rule in an absolute fashion it appears that Pope Pius XI thought of Christ's kingship along similar lines. Christ is a powerful heavenly father ruler who is set things right if we only submit to his governance.

2. Using human models, no matter how exalted or powerful to describe or understand the kingship of Christ, can easily miss lead us into limiting our Lord's authority and power. Misunderstandings of this sort can become obstacles to our efforts to live as faithful followers of the risen Christ. It is all too easy to follow the wrong understanding of Christ, as shown by many who use Christianity as a weapon to subdue criticize and exclude others. (In my understanding this is large part the problem of Christian Nationalism.)

Calling this Sunday Christ the King may elevate that image above all others. Currently on the world scene, some nations have rejected monarchies, some maintain figurehead monarchs, and some, while not using the term king, maintain heads of state with absolute even ruthless power over the people. The Bible promises that God's power and majesty differ radically from the reign of most human monarchs. Thus we need to use the image of King as correcting the image of king.

We live in an age of increasing secularism, fear, nationalism, atheism anti-semitism to start naming a few of the "isms". Many people have lost their faith in God. Many people have been raised with the image of an angry judgmental God who wields harsh treatment over human lives. What frustrates us is that, our God is a God that we cannot control. The fear that we humans have causes us to trade in the freedoms that we do

possess for a certain security which yields to oppression. What is this fear that drives us to seize or to cede, or relinquish the authority that we do carry? Our civil society hangs in the balance.

Our readings today offer us consideration to be able to trust in the absolute kingship of Christ. This last Sunday of the church year we complete the gospel of Matthew where we have heard many parables and lessons to the disciples. Now Jesus is addressing the nations. He is the King and enfleshed in the suffering Jesus who is made accessible through acts of mercy. Here is Jesus's unmistakable revelation of God's true nature. As son of man, Jesus associates himself not with a brilliant, the pious, the famous, or the powerful, but with the least. Those who suffer are close to the heart of God and those who minister to the suffering receive the fathers' blessing.

As well in Matthew today, this is Jesus's last address before he is handed over for his crucifixion. Jesus said in the first verse of Matthew that when the son of man comes in glory and all the angels with him, he will sit on the throne of his glory all nations will be gathered before him and people separate people one from another is a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats"

He goes on to describe these acts of mercy, relief for those who are suffering who are hungry, thirsty, estranged, naked, sick and imprisoned. We can look for and see Jesus in the face of these situation's and his charge to us is to take care. Think back to his sermon on the mount. He is offering us the very guidebook of instruction.

God is here, in the messiness and ambiguity of human life. God is here particularly in your neighbor, the one who needs you. Do you want to see the face of God? Look into the face of one of the least of these the vulnerable, the weak, the children. Through obedience, and faith with

works of compassion we respond to his criterion of judgement.

Coming up on the Christmas season enjoyment Handel's messiah we will sing and claim him king of kings and lord of lords. He shall reign forever and ever. Moving towards Advent in preparation for Christmas, or Christ- with-us our gospel is a fitting call to ponder how well we have lived this past year, not only in anticipation of Christ coming , but of Christ always with us.

How have we seen Christ in our daily lives and in the people around us, especially those who go unseen? How have we "seen" them? Reflecting on our gospel John Shay once envisioned asking the "'sheep" in God's kingdom how they got there. They said," We just cared for every person we met immediately, without calculation."

Then the sheep added, "it was no big deal", an indication of how habitual, how natural, this attitude is in the kingdom of God. How well have you prepared for God's kingdom?