

Christ the King 2021/Nov. 21, 2021

Grace and peace be with you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

So... today is the last Sunday in the Church Year. Next Sunday we begin again with Year C - the Luke Year. This was the Mark year if you didn't catch it.

Today we end the year by celebrating that Christ is our King, and we begin the year, starting next week, with the anticipation of the coming of the Lord.

As you may know, Christ the King Sunday was initiated in 1925 by Pope Pius, because he was highly concerned about the fascism taking hold in Europe after WWI, beginning with Mussolini in Italy, and followed by Hitler in Germany and Franco in Spain.

Pius didn't want Christians to get sucked into following fascists who cared nothing for the people and only about themselves. They were violent and greedy dictators. They were the complete opposite of Christ and God's rule.

Pius wanted us to remember that there are forces in the world that will claim to be supreme, but God is greater than all of them, and God calls us to live in the world differently.

Last year I found this crown and thought, that's a nice decorative item for Christ the King. It looks good with a candle in it.

But, this year I thought, hmmm..... I don't like it anymore. It's too earthly kingdomy.

What we really need is a crown of thorns. That's what we need to be contemplating today. Not a fake gold colored crown made in China, but the crown that mocked Jesus' real power. The crown he wore before the cross. The crown of thorns.

The crown of thorns is the crown of Christ the King. So, we can't really celebrate today without first remembering the cross.

The powers of Jesus' time, basically the Roman Empire and those who corroborated with them, killed Jesus.

Violence, hate, jealousy, greed, and fear killed the King of Kings, and they did it in as humiliating a way as possible on a cross. That's why I've placed the crucifix in the crown this morning.

I didn't have a crown of thorns, but I did have this crucifix, and we can't proclaim Christ's kingship without first remembering that he was crucified. Jesus was crucified. He was killed. He was dead and buried.

And, on the third day, he rose from the grave. Jesus was resurrected into Christ our King. He's not just some example of the Godly life, he is our king, the one who rules our lives over and beyond any earthly power.

In Christ, God looks at sin and death and says – No! No! That is not how creation's story ends, because creation is eternal just as God is eternal.

So, God takes sin and death and turns them into light and life. God always turns death into life. Christ the King transforms our sin into eternal life.

But that doesn't mean we run around willy nilly in cheap grace saying – oh – it doesn't matter. Jesus forgives me.

No – or course not. That is the definition of sin in and of itself – total self-centeredness.

When we say Christ is King, it means more than just having a benevolent and loving ruler. God is not a magic genie who just gives us what we want.

Saying Christ is our King means that we live under his rule. We follow him by looking out for the most vulnerable in our own time and place.

For fascists, they kill anyone and everyone who disagrees with them. They kill the outcasts and those who challenge them.

Christ our king was killed. He didn't kill anyone.

My grandmother was able to escape to the US from Germany just as Hitler was coming into power. Her sister wasn't so lucky.

She was a single mother who refused to join the Nazi party, and because she refused to join the party, she was thrown into a concentration camp.

She was lucky to be Christian though, because she wasn't killed there. She was released, but she was as much as dead in society, because she was unable to work. No one would hire her. No one would associate with her. She was branded as a dangerous outcast, so she and her daughter had to live at the mercy of her other sisters and mother. There was nothing else they could do.

My great-grandmother and great-aunts had to live under fascism, but they didn't have to be fascists. It was hard and painful and horrible, but they stuck together and they made it through step by step. Unfortunately, they had to do what they had to do to survive in those circumstances, but they didn't lose their humanity. They didn't lose Christ.

My great-aunt persisted and resisted, and she and her daughter survived only because her family took care of her in defiance of Hitler. They were able to live the Kingdom of God in the midst of a dictator.

Things are not that difficult today as they were then. Thank God. Living the Kingdom of God here and now isn't nearly as deadly as it was back then, but we still do have to make decisions today in how we live in this world and we have to ask ourselves what takes precedence. World or God?

In Christ's Kingdom, it is always about lifting up the least, last, lost, and lowly. In Christ's Kingdom, it's all about taking sides with the outcast and oppressed.

And when we are the outcast and oppressed, we are to yell out to God and everyone who will hear it, because God hears those cries. God answers those cries, and God does that in the flesh – first with Jesus and now through us via the Holy Spirit.

In Christ's Kingdom, the Spirit is at work – loving, healing, bringing peace – and those things have to be delivered in the flesh – you and I, we are that flesh. We are God's presence in the world.

We are Christ in the world when we follow him into death for the sake of others and then rise into his glorious resurrection attached to his eternal life on the other side.

Life cannot be hoarded. It has to be shared. Jesus' life, death, and resurrection are proof of that. In the Kingdom of God, there is an ever flowing stream of love and those baptismal waters gush forth through us. Ok – maybe sometimes they just trickle.

But, as citizens of the Kingdom of God, we are called to live differently in the world. We are called to stand up to oppression in all of its forms. For Jesus, it was sin and death. For Paul and the apostles, it was Rome. For Pius, it was Mussolini, Hitler, and Franco. For my family, it was Hitler.

The question is – who is it for us today? Who is Christ the King calling us to stand up to? At what injustice are we called to yell – You are not the boss of us! Christ is!

In Germany, there is a tradition on the 11<sup>th</sup> day before Advent to spend time reflecting on that question so that a resolution can be made on the 1<sup>st</sup> day of the Church year – the first Sunday of Advent.

It was started in Eastern Germany during Communism, and it was done alone in secret then, because the Church had to go underground. It was quite obvious for them who the anti-Christ was – the opposite of Christ.

But, who or what is it for us today?

You have a week to think about it if you want to take it on in the new Church year. Part of living in the Kingdom of God is that when we recognize injustice, God uses us to make a change in the world.

So, whatever it is you see as being oppressive, share it with me, because we are never called into these things alone. We are not a single subject to Christ. We are an entire kingdom of believers – a community.

Christ is our King, and we are his anticipated presence in the world here and now.

That's how the Church year ends. Thanks be to God. Amen.