

Christ the King – Year B

Today we are celebrating the last Sunday of the church year – most often referred to as “Christ the King” Sunday – and it is somewhat like the feast of the Holy Trinity, in that those charged to preach would often prefer NOT to on this feast. But preach, I will.

Our first reading from Daniel seems like a perfect choice for this “titled” feast – all about the Ancient One on the Throne, giving the kingdom that will never end to one like a human, or in another translation, to the Son of Man. Read from a Christian perspective, this text has often been applied to Jesus, and some of the evangelists even have Jesus himself making reference to this text. But there is much more going on behind the text that makes it especially relevant to our times, I believe.

The book of Daniel was written during a time when the Judeans were being persecuted. They were captives of “foreign” kings. The temple had been profaned, the religious practices of the Jews were forbidden, and those who would not sacrifice to the gods of these foreign kings were murdered. The captive Judeans were enslaved and robbed of their identity. The prophet Daniel, then, who was thrown to the lions when he would not sacrifice to an idol, survived and becomes the model of fidelity to God. He is able to interpret visions, and then has several dreams or visions of his own – which is what we hear part of this morning. And through this vision, the people of God are re-assured, in the midst of their suffering, that God will indeed come through for them, that there will come a kingdom that lasts forever, and that will encompass “all peoples, nations, and languages.”

But now let us look at the gospel and see what the kingdom looks like there. I’ve said before that when Jesus speaks of the kingdom of God in parables, when Jesus says “The Kingdom of God is like...” – he’s telling us what it looks like when we’re living in the realm, the reign, the way, the *presence* of God. And when, at the beginning of Mark’s gospel, we were told, “Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God has come near...repent, and believe in the good news!’” Jesus is saying essentially – God is *not* far away, but present here and now. Repent – turn and change your perspective, your worldview, and *believe* that God is present!”

This kingdom that Jesus describes is not a place. He is not talking about 'heaven' or some future place where everything will be wonderful. For Jesus, the kingdom of God, the place where God dwells, is with us. The kingdom, for Jesus, is a way of living – not a place. The reign of God is in relationship, not in power or dominion.

We live in the kingdom of God when we live the life Jesus modeled for us. We acknowledge the reign of Christ when we acknowledge the truth Jesus says he came into the world to testify to – the truth that God is love, and God dwells with us. The kingdom of God, the reign of Christ, is to be here and now, not in a future heaven.

This feast of Christ the King was only instituted in 1925 – as a means to combat secularism, and to encourage people to surrender to the reign of God instead of the reign of temporal powers. I suppose it was a way of saying, "Follow THIS King – follow Christ as King – instead of the political and secular leaders of the time."

But hear what Jesus says in John's Gospel when Pilate says, "So you are a king?" – Jesus says, "You say I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice." In other words, you want to frame this in terms of ruling, in terms of dominance. You say I am a king." I say, I am here to testify to the truth. – And the truth that Jesus has consistently preached is that same good news we heard in the beginning – that God's reign is already here and now, and we have only to open our eyes to it. We are already part of the reign of God, because God is at our core. The Word took flesh and dwelt among us. The kingdom of God is about relationship, not about power or dominion or amassed riches.

Karoline Lewis, from Luther Seminary, puts it this way: "The concept of kingdom is radically recalculated in the Gospel of John, from kingdoms that strain and sever relationships to a kingdom that puts relationship at its core. That's a whole different perspective on kingdom. When kingdom is construed from the truth of relationship and not rule, from the truth of incarnation and not location, from the truth of love and not law, then Jesus as truth will ring true."

The reign of Christ is not about a place. It's not about kingship. It is a way of living. As we sit in this week when we end one church year and step into the season of expectation and anticipation that we call Advent, I pray that we can chew on what it means, really, to live in the reign of Christ.

If we acknowledge the truth of Christ, the truth, as Karoline Lewis put it, of love and not law, of relationship and not rule, - but mostly, if we acknowledge the truth of Christ as incarnation – that great wonder that we celebrate as Christmas – we must be changed. We cannot hear someone say brazenly that money is more important than justice, as we did this past week, and remain silent. We cannot hear and see the effects of what we have done to the earth and our atmosphere and say climate change is fake news. We cannot pretend, and we cannot contend that one group is good and another bad because of their skin color or political party or ethnic background or sexual identity. Because the truth of Jesus is that God took on ALL flesh – not white flesh or rich flesh or Western or First World flesh. The truth of Jesus is that all life, the life of Jews and Arabs and Yemeni and African-Americans and native peoples and Caucasians, all life is from God, and all life matters.

Fr. Thomas Keating died last month. He was a Trappist monk, like Thomas Merton, and taught the practice of Centering Prayer. There was a wonderful article about him in America magazine recently. Part of it said, “If there is one thing our country needs right now, it is what Father Keating tried to teach: a disposition of the heart that leads us to love and respect one another. And even more, we need the calm and presence and silence that will help us reduce the toxicity in our public discourse and become present to the gentleness and goodness within each of us.”

A disposition of the heart – yes, I think that's what the Kingdom, the reign of Christ is about. So as we think about Advent coming, and what practices we might adopt for that season, let us ask ourselves what will change the disposition of our hearts... what will give us a heart more present to the gentleness and goodness within each of us. That is what the Reign of Christ is. Amen.

[Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14](#) [Psalm 93](#) [Revelation 1:4b-8](#) [John 18:33-37](#)