

Sermon

Christ the King B 2024 November 24, 2024

John 18:33-37

Here we are on the Last Sunday after Pentecost, also known as Christ the King Sunday. On the Church calendar we have come through his birth, Passion, resurrection, ascension, and life in general to end up here where we proclaim Jesus as King of kings and Lord of lords. And while it is good and proper that we acknowledge Christ as King, we have to be careful about the details. What I mean by that is this: we need to be careful about not worshiping an idol of Jesus that we've made in our image.

Our image of kings has been shaped by what we have seen and learned over time. From the medieval kings of Europe to Pharaohs, warlords, chieftains, and, yes, even Popes, we have an image of what a king is and how he should act. Some kings are more tyrannical than others, but ultimately a king has absolute power to rule absolutely, and always does so in his own best interest.

There are those in the world today who would use this view of a king for Jesus. Christian nationalism and other heresies that promote a manly, muscular Christ who conquers his enemies by force, and always with our help, are on the rise. These beliefs and movements distort and corrupt the message of Christ, twisting it to serve the sole purpose of feeding their egos and fueling their grasp for worldly power. The kingly Jesus they want is one who operates like Caesar - crushing enemies and establishing "peace" through forcibly silencing anyone who opposes them.

But that is not the Christ of the gospels. It is not the Christ of the New Testament. And it should not be the Christ we proclaim.

The kingdom of Christ, and the reign of Christ the King that we proclaim and that Christ lived into, turns those dominionistic and nationalistic ideas upside down. Proclaiming Christ as King is not an act of power and control, but a subversive act of love. We see this not only in the New Testament, but throughout all scripture.

Jesus, King of kings and Lord of lords, Second Person of the Trinity and coeternal with the Father, came to earth as a helpless, powerless, and vulnerable infant. John the Baptist refers to him twice as the Lamb of God. Revelation uses the Lamb as an image of Christ multiple times. Jesus says he came not to be served, but to serve.

He says he is humble and gentle in spirit. And most tellingly, when asked directly by Pilate, Jesus says, “My kingdom is not from this world. If it were from this world, my followers would be fighting for me.”

Christ the King presents us with a very different kind of king from what people normally desire. He is the God and King of reversals. We want big, he comes small. He leads by serving. He lives through dying. Last week we read the Prayer of Hannah:

The bows of the mighty are broken, the feeble gird on strength.
Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread,
 But those who were hungry are fat with spoil.
The Lord raises up the poor and lifts the needy.

The Song of Mary is a similar prayer/prophecy:

He has cast down the mighty and lifted up the lowly.
He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty.

The kingdom of God runs counter to the kingdoms and desires of men.

Whereas the kingdoms of men seek to build walls, the kingdom of God is always open.

Whereas the kingdoms of men seek to expel those deemed different,
 the kingdom of God draws in all people.

Whereas the kingdoms of men control and limit resources,
 the kingdom of God sows the seeds of reckless generosity
 so that all may be fed and healed.

The kingdom of God is based on justice, mercy, and love. The kingdom of God works to bring restoration to the outcast. The kingdom of God works to feed, clothe, and heal the hungry, the naked, and the damaged.

If the kingdoms of earth do not work to do these things, then they are not of God. And if the kingdoms of earth proclaim they are being led by a Jesus who does not do these things, then they are being led by an idol of Jesus made in their own image.

If we proclaim Christ as King, then we must proclaim the Christ of subversive love. If we proclaim Christ as King, then we must proclaim the Christ of the Beloved Community. If we proclaim Christ as King, then we must proclaim Christ as the King of peace. If we proclaim Christ as King, then we must proclaim Christ as the One who stands against violence, degradation, separation, and hatred.

Proclaiming Christ as King is to make a bold proclamation and to take a bold stand against the corrupt, divisive, and self-serving powers of the world in favor of the Kingdom of love, justice, mercy, and healing. It is by proclaiming Christ as King in this way that we will take back the definition of the Reign of Christ that has been corrupted and twisted by the powers of the world.

If we do that - unapologetically, boldly, and faithfully, then we just might get a glimpse of God's kingdom here on earth . . . as it is in heaven.

Amen.