

Christ the King Sunday. It is the last Sunday in the Christian year. We began with Advent and Christmas, moved through Epiphany, Lent and Easter. Then we began Pentecost and ended with Kingdom Tide. The early church had celebrated each Sunday as a little resurrection service. They were convinced that Jesus would come back very soon. After a couple of centuries, the church realized that maybe it had calculated wrong. It was in the third century that the church decided to order worship. They began with the Easter Cycle – Lent and Easter. Using 40 days during Lent to prepare for Easter was well accepted by the church. After that came the Advent/Christmas cycle. So the church put together the church year based on the life of Jesus. Churches who follow the liturgical cycle use scripture lessons related to the church year. The common lectionary sets out four lessons for each Sunday – Old Testament, Psalm, Gospel and Epistle lessons. The worship for each Sunday centers on any one of the lessons. If a church is faithful in using the lectionary lessons each Sunday, during the 3 year cycle, the worship will cover about 80 percent of the Bible.

So today, we come to Christ the King Sunday. We don't pay much attention to kings in America . We opted out of the system of a male ruler of a kingdom for a representative form of government. Instead of living in a Kingdom, ruled by a King, we live in a country based on law and guided by representatives of the people. So Christ the King can be a difficult image for us. Especially if one views the King as not very benevolent and kind to people in the kingdom.

In the Luke passage for today, at the crucifixion, Jesus is mocked by the inscription placed over him that read, "This is the King of the Jews." They Jews had no kingdom, they were under the power of Rome, and the inscription was meant to point out that this King of the Jews was powerless – he was like the Jewish people. Being charged as a King was also a way to justify the crucifixion of Jesus. If he was a king, he would be against the Roman Empire, which would be sedition – which is the charge against Jesus that led the Romans to crucify him. Pilate had questioned Jesus about his kingship – assuming that if Jesus were a king, then he would have a kingdom over which he ruled. Jesus answered Pilate by saying that his "kingdom was not of this world."

It is difficult to picture Jesus from this passage in Luke as a King. He had no Kingdom over which he ruled. He had no army. He had no power. His followers had deserted him at his crucifixion. What sort of King is Jesus? Who is this King that suffers and dies on the cross?

What the Romans did not understand is that the Kingdom of God was a kingdom that did not have an army. It was not a kingdom that crushed its enemies. It was a kingdom in which God ruled over the hearts and minds of followers – a kingdom built on the rule that "You will love your neighbor as yourself." This King Jesus brought people into a kingdom that crosses national boundaries, color, race, language, economic class. Jesus is King of a Kingdom that is not a kingdom because of the might of its army, the amount of land and wealth it is able to amass. It is a kingdom that exist in relationship between neighbors. The sort of King that Jesus was does not fit with the image that the world thinks of when it uses the word, "King."

What about the people who make up this Kingdom of God? What does it mean to be a loyal subject in this Kingdom of God? I think that is a good question for us to use today as we talk about Christ the King. How does one be loyal, how does one serve this King that we call Jesus?

When I was in elementary school, my report card was important. I suspect that is true for Chris, Olivia and Lillian today. I don't know what is on their report card in the way of grading – the way of determining how they are doing in school classes. On my report card, I was graded on classes like reading, arithmetic, writing. I liked getting my report card to see how I was doing. We had one grade that my parents looked at first. It was citizenship. I did not have much trouble with the other classes, but citizenship could be a problem and that seemed to be the most important grade to my parents. Worst of all, that grade was not a letter grade. We would get E for excellent, G for good, F for fair and P for poor. If I did not get an E, it meant that I would have lots of work to do on that subject for the next grading period. Citizenship grade was just a written sentence, not a letter grade. Citizenship included things like effort put into studying, effort put into listening in class, into cooperating and behaving. Sometimes my citizenship grade would say "daydreams in class." What that means is that I was not paying attention in the class. Sometimes the citizenship grade would say, "Works hard." That was a good grade in citizenship.

PILGRIM C H U R C H

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Our Matthew text today is like a report card – it is about an account of the way we have lived our lives – kinda like Citizenship.

Maybe a grade would be given on obedience. How have we obeyed the commandment to love our neighbors as ourselves? Matthew says that all the nations will be gathered before God. I think it is important that this accounting is given to nations. I believe that corporate sins are just as important as individual sins. The King separates the people – like separating sheep and goats. They are given a grade on how they have lived their lives – how they have done in the class of obedience of loving our neighbor as ourselves. How have we done with “the least of these?” Who are the least of these?

I am thinking they are the poor and needy, those oppressed by society. This obedience class seems important to the King. How is one obedient? Well it includes how we treated our neighbor who is hungry, or thirsty, or the stranger, or those who are poor and need clothes or those sick or in prison.

What sort of King is this Jesus? What sort of Kingdom is this Kingdom of God? I think Matthew is telling us that God does not overlook the deeds of those in the Kingdom who listen and are obedient to this commandment of loving the neighbor. These deeds of kindness may go unnoticed by the world, but they are important to Christ the King.