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Christ The King: Ezekiel 34.11-16, 20-24; Matthew 25.31-46

“[the] manifold evils in this world [are] due to the fact that the majority of men ha[ve] thrust Jesus Christ and his holy law out of their lives” wrote Pope Pius XI in 1929, “that [Christ] has no place either in private affairs or in politics: and...as long as individuals and states refuse to submit to the rule of our Savior, there [will] be no really hopeful prospect of a lasting peace among nations.”¹

These words of Pius XI instituted the observance of what became *Christ the King Sunday* – which we now celebrate as the last Sunday in the church calendar year. While Anglicans didn’t pick up this feast until 1970, its purpose is clear: on this Sunday, we proudly and unabashedly proclaim our allegiance and faithfulness to our only true leader: Jesus Christ. On this day, any and all other affiliations we might have fall away, are insignificant when compared to the overwhelming lordship of Jesus Christ. On this day we are reminded that it does not matter if we are a Longhorn or an Aggie, whether our particular political party is in power in Austin or Washington, or for that matter whether we are even Americans. Because Jesus Christ, in the words of our epistle from Ephesians, “has [been] raised...from the dead and seated...at [God’s] right hand in the heavenly places, *far above* all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above *every* name that is named.”²

¹ Pope Pius XI, *Quas Primas*, Encyclical on the Feast of Christ the King, December 11, 1925.

² Ephesians 1.20-21

Far above. Not even the most powerful empire, the grandest leader, the country with the most weapons, the biggest army, the most money...these all pale in comparison to God's power.

Christ is our only king.

And yet it's not true, is it? Or perhaps I should rephrase that – we don't act like it's true, do we?

Countries around the world continue to struggle for dominance (whatever that means). We still think that having more and bigger guns than the other guy is the best solution for peace; we pursue economic policies which make the rich richer while the poor get poorer and more marginalized – like having more actually means something. Surely not, if Christ is our king? As Pius pointed out, if individuals and states refuse to submit to Christ, there can be no lasting peace;

But Pius' comments were not only directed at the nations – he charged *individuals* as well as states with submitting to Christ's rule. I mean, it's hard to say that Christ is our king when we allow other obligations to interfere with our weekly observance of the Lord's Day, when we "neglect to meet together."³ It doesn't look like Christ is our king when we haven't enough money left at the end of the month to meet our pledge. And can we really say that Christ is our king when we haven't found time to open our bibles all week but yet somehow we made sure we didn't miss the Big Game or our favorite TV show? I know I am guilty. Yes, I accuse myself too – I am aware of that large "log in my own eye."⁴ Church is my job, and yet I still make up

³ Hebrews 10.25

⁴ Matthew 7.3

reasons as to why I can't say Morning Prayer every day, why I can't attend daily Chapel services, why I don't have time to read scripture.

I am talking about how intentional we are about following Jesus as our king: the deliberate choices we make with how we spend our time, how we use our money, how we seek to further our relationship with God.

Habits of discipleship.

These habits orient us towards Christ, and in turn make us better Christians and healthier human beings. Following Christ as our king means forming good habits, being actively formed into disciples. It's a lifelong process of spiritual growth, of aligning our minds, hearts and wills with God's purpose. It's not enough just to show up. Following Christ is an active, not a passive commitment.

And as if to illustrate what a life of submission to Christ our king looks like, we are presented with this scenario from Matthew's gospel on the return of the Son of Man, in all his glory. "I was hungry and you gave me food" the king says, "I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me." These are the habits of Christ followers.

It seems a little daunting, doesn't it? Are we supposed to take that literally? Do I have to volunteer at a food bank, a homeless shelter, a refugee *and* jail ministry? Well, maybe. It

certainly wouldn't hurt to be involved in at least one of those worthwhile ministries – all of which you can do right here through St. Alban's. However, what unites all of these activities: feeding, welcoming, clothing, caring, visiting...these are all relational in their nature. These are the very *habits* that characterize living in relationship, in community.

Be a good neighbor – but here's the catch – not just to those who look like you, who might reciprocate your hospitality, or might be beneficial to you in some way, but truly *see* those around you: the homeless guy in the park, the elderly neighbor who doesn't have any family, the lonely colleague in the lunch room. One of the books I'm reading right now for my online community project laments that we seem to view real community as somehow illusive and naïve. "But perhaps in actuality most of us [already] have all the 'community' we need: neighbors, coworkers, relatives, and friends. Our challenge," the author states, "is to learn to embrace, nurture, and cultivate these relationships to their fullest potential – to become the best kind of neighbor, daughter, uncle, colleague, or friend."⁵

Under God's rule, God's economy, there is no "getting ahead" of our neighbor. We are in this together. If Christ is our king, better than/cooler than/richer than/smarter than – these comparisons just doesn't make sense. There are only fat sheep and lean sheep (as the Ezekiel reading tells us); sheep and goats. Christ the King Sunday should shock us into recognizing that those "others" who we often overlook...those just might well be the lean sheep.

If we truly seek a peaceful world where Christ is king, it starts with our own individual peace, our family peace, our community's peace. It starts with us – you and me – recognizing who is

⁵ Mark Scandrette, quoted in Jesse Rice, *The Church of Facebook* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2009), 171.

our neighbor; it starts with looking past people's faults to see them as the "image of God,"⁶ of "respecting the dignity of every human being"⁷; it starts with, in the words of Baptism, "promising to follow and obey [Jesus Christ] as [our] Lord."⁸ Being 'at peace;' 'following Christ' are habits, intentionally curated habits.

Next week we begin the season of Advent, where we focus on waiting patiently for Christ's return, examining our habits, and the pattern of our lives, to ensure that we are ready, that we can stand before "the great judgment seat of Christ"⁹ and be counted worthy.

Is Christ truly our king? Then let's let it show: in our lives, in our relationships, in our church family and in our communities.

⁶ Genesis 1.27

⁷ Book of Common Prayer, Baptismal Covenant (p. 305)

⁸ Book of Common Prayer, Baptism Rite (p. 303)

⁹ Book of Common Prayer, Evening Prayer: Suffrages B (p. 68/122); based on 2Corinthians 5.10