

A Homily by  
The Rev'd Jo Popham

Christ the King Sunday – Pentecost 25 – November 22, 2020  
“Come reign in us!”  
Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24  
Ephesians 1:15-23  
Matthew 25:31-46

Today is November 22<sup>nd</sup> in year of the Lord, 2020. Next week we begin anew with Advent, but this Sunday is the last Sunday of the long church season after Pentecost in Year A of the lectionary readings. We call this Sunday Christ the King Sunday to remember the Reign of Christ.

The Prophet Ezekiel was sent by God. He was to prophesy against Israel's kings, who had misused their people and were responsible for scattering them (Ezekiel 34:22). God wanted to reverse those unrighteous deeds. He wanted to seek out the sheep, and “rescue” (v. [12](#)) them from wherever they have been scattered. God wanted to “gather them” (v. [13](#)) and bring them back, restore them. Essentially, God wanted humankind to be reborn. When the time was right, God sent Jesus his son to us as king to do God's will among us. God put all things under Christ's feet and has made Christ the head over all things for the church (Ephesians 1:22). God made him King.

We heard the words of today's Epistle and Gospel readings in this year of the Lord, 2020. 2020 A.D. has been a year that we all will remember forever. It is a year that we all hope will end on a high note rather than remember 2020 A.D. for all the negative things that have happened this year. 2020 A.D. does not mean two thousand years after the death of Jesus Christ. No A.D. stands for *Anno Domini* – the year of the Lord. It now is 2000 years since Paul's Letter to the Church in Ephesus and the Gospel according to Matthew were written. We now are 2000 years into the future from when those words were written. Today, as every Sunday we recall the resurrection of Jesus all those centuries ago. That means that Christ has reigned all these 2000 years. And it also means he reigns today and that Jesus the Christ will reign forever. But. He reigns through us, his church.

The Jews expected the messiah to come. In Greek the word for Messiah is Christ. Both mean the anointed one, as kings were anointed at their coronations. But the Jews expected a king who would deliver Israel from the oppression of the Romans. Unlike the messiah most Jews expected, Jesus came to free all people, both Jews and Gentiles. He did not come to free them from the Romans, but from sin and death. And Jesus the Christ – the Messiah – the anointed one – the king of the Jews – came not to rule over just the kingdom of this world but of the heavens too, as king of all.

The celebration of the Reign of Christ the King is the newest of traditions in liturgical churches like ours and the Roman Catholic Church. It was added to the church calendar in 1925. Historically what was going on in the world that had such an impact on church leaders that they would dedicate the end of the Church year as Christ the King Sunday? Joan Chittister, a Benedictine nun and spiritual leader of our day, explains the addition this way: “In an era of the downfall of monarchies and nations, of security and peace...[it was thought that] “only the acknowledgment of the kingship of Christ – above and beyond any other earthly power – could really bring liberty, order, harmony, and peace to the world.”<sup>1</sup>

We heard in Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians that God gave Jesus the power by raising him “from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion” – of earthly kings and leaders – “not only in this age but also in the age to come” (Ephesians 1:20-21).

Of course, Jesus was well acquainted with the oppressive kings in the secular world. In contrast to them, Jesus’s role was that of humble service. And he taught his followers in today’s Gospel reading to be servants – to care for the needy. And he listed six works of mercy by which we ourselves will be judged:

Feed the hungry;

Give the thirsty something to drink;

Welcome the stranger;

Clothe the naked;  
Care for the sick; and  
Visit prisoners (Matthew 25:35-36).

The hungry our Lord described were not only hungry for bread – but hungry for love. Naked not only for clothing but naked of human dignity and respect. The homeless are Christ in distressing disguise.” Can you see him?

As some of you may know, near the first stopping off point on the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela in Spain there is a shrine dedicated to a Bishop in France. Martin of Tours was a Roman soldier who had become a Christian. William Barklay, the Scottish theologian and writer, professor, and Anglican priest tells this story: “One cold winter day, as he was entering a city, a beggar stopped him and asked for alms. Martin had no money, but the beggar was blue and shivering with cold, and Martin gave what he had. He took off his soldier’s coat, worn and frayed as it was; he cut it in two and gave it to the beggar man. That night [Martin] had a dream. In it he saw the heavenly places and all the angels and Jesus in the midst of them; and Jesus was wearing half of a roman soldier’s cloak. One of the angels said to Jesus: “Master, why are you wearing that battered old cloak? Who gave it to you?” And Jesus answered softly, “My servant Martin gave it to me.”<sup>2</sup> Martin was helping Christ himself when he helped that beggar.

For a time one cold spring – too long of a time – our son Troy lived on the mean streets of Washington, D.C. For years after people would stop me walking down the street to ask me if I had a son who looked just like me. And when I answered that I did, a man shared with me that Troy had given him his coat one day. Another homeless man told me that he had given him his gloves. Another street person stopped me to say: Mam, a boy who looks like you was standing right here on this corner passing out bagels one day and donuts another day. Could it be that they saw Christ in my son? Or is it more likely that Troy saw Christ the King in them?

Christ's kingship is tied to humble service to people who are hungry or thirsty or a stranger who was naked or sick or in prison. He taught his disciples – and us – that a kingdom of justice and judgment is balanced only with radical love, mercy, peace, and forgiveness. When we celebrate Christ as King, we are not celebrating an oppressive ruler, but one willing to die for all humanity and whose loving-kindness endures forever.

We are called into relationship with one another and with the world – however unlikely those relationships may be. On this Christ the King Sunday and every day “we are called to look at each other and see Christ. It is as simple – and as hard – as that.”<sup>3</sup>

Usually the growth of a church drives the outreach ministry of that church. But here at St. Andrew's by the Sea, it appears to be the other way around. Could it be that our growth can and will spring from our choice to be Christ's hands and feet in the world? Christ is reigning here through our acts of mercy and our love for one another and all people.

YES! Christ the King reigns here. My friends, Jesus Christ – the Messiah – is still with us.<sup>4</sup> And we must live like it. We must ask him to come reign in us!

Lord, let it be so.

Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Joan Chittister, *The Liturgical Year, the spiraling adventure of the spiritual life*, p. 188.

<sup>2</sup> William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew*, vol. 2, rev. Edition, 1975, p. 326.

<sup>3</sup> Barbara Brown Taylor in her book *The Preaching Life* masterfully speaks of being disciples of a Jesus saying we are to minister to “the least ones--the waitresses, the door-to-door magazine salesmen, the nursing home residents, the panhandlers, the inmates, the strangers at the grocery store” because, of course, these people matter to God, and Jesus makes this clear .... Not just in church, but in everyday encounters with others, [we are] all children of God: “We are called to look at each other and see Christ.” It is as simple, and as hard, as that.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 10-11.