

Sunday November 23, 2025
Reign of Christ Sunday – Proper 29

Sermon: “KOTW V KOG”

I don't know why I haven't noticed before, but the lessons today sum up the first half of the Christian year, and almost the entirety of the Christian story (the second half of the year, from Pentecost to today, is largely the teachings of Jesus). It starts with the Song of Zechariah. Things were rotten in Denmark, I mean in Israel, especially in Jerusalem. The king of Galilee was a vassal, appointed by the Romans; a Roman prefect ruled over Judea, including the capital, Jerusalem; even the high priest was a Roman appointee. Life was impossibly difficult for the average citizen of Israel who could not afford housing, food, and two sets of taxes – one for Rome and one for the temple. And into this darkness came a child who is to

“be called the prophet of the Most High,
for [he] will go before the Lord to prepare the way,
to give the people knowledge of salvation
by the forgiveness of their sins” – John the Baptist – the one who will precede the Messiah, the Christ. Here we are on the last day of the liturgical year, the day in the Christian calendar referred to as Christ the King Sunday reading the story of Advent. And the second lesson? The second lesson is about the end of Jesus' life – the crucifixion. Neither story seems, at least at first glance, to speak about the kingship of Jesus. What is going on? Why these two readings on this day?

Okay, so I'll admit that the sermon last Sunday was a bit of a downer. All that talk of powerful leaders who deceive countless numbers of people through the use of misinformation and disinformation; the numerous wars, terrorism, hatred, bigotry, and racism plaguing our world; the economic warfare that is tariffs which, ultimately, is all about the concentration of wealth in the hands of the few at the expense of the many; climate change and the ensuing extreme weather events; epidemics; famines; and the polycrises – drugs, mental health, housing, affordability, environment, health care crises, and more; and

the persecution of Christians, not just where we expect to see it, in places like North Korea, Somalia, Yemen, Libya, and Sudan, but in places we least expect to see it, like the US of A (at least for the WRONG kind of Christians – those who don't worship a militaristic Jesus). Yet, that sermon last Sunday was like part one of a tv show that ends with the words 'To Be Continued.' Last week's sermon was a lead in for today's.

Reign of Christ Sunday, or Christ the King Sunday started in the first half of the twentieth century. It was the Pope's subversive pushback against the rise of fascism in Europe. Franco, Mussolini, and Hitler were all self-appointed demigods who were going to rule over their territory, possibly over the whole world, if they could manage to conquer it. Christ the King was the Pope's way of declaring who really ruled the world and who we really owed fealty to, that is, who we ought to follow with all our hearts, our minds, our souls, our strength.

So why are we concerned about the dark mess of this world? Because it reveals to us what happens when the kingdoms of this world rule and why we need a ruler who will rule another way, a way that leads to light, not darkness. The mess reveals our need to be saved from our base desires for wealth and power and control – the three things that result in war, terrorism, inequality, poverty, environmental degradation, climate change, famine, plagues, and mass human suffering. Thousands of years of empires have revealed themselves to be disastrous to most of humankind, only perhaps benefitting a few, and that is a maybe. We need a saviour to show us a better way.

And into that mess, comes Jesus, nailed to his throne – the cross. Empire has revealed itself to be cruel and callous. Jesus revealed a different way of living, a different way of being. Jesus consorted with, ate with, and healed the ritually unclean. He talked with harlots; ate with tax collectors – the worst kind of Jews, Roman collaborators; and healed lepers. He showed compassion to the woman caught in the act of adultery. He gave sight to the blind, healed the crippled, cured the fever of a Roman centurion's daughter, raised a girl presumed dead, and raised Lazarus from death. He spoke out against the

hypocrisy of some of the religious leaders and sects. He overturned the tables of those who took financial advantage of pilgrims at the temple. Why he even took off his outer garment, tied a towel around his waist, and knelt down like a slave to wash the feet of his students and called them friends. What other king do you know of who would do such a thing? Can you imagine the current president of the US of A taking off his suit jacket, tying a towel around his large girth, kneeling at the dirty, stinky, unshod feet of his sycophants to wash their feet and to call them friends – equals – in the process? Of course you can't, because the president is only concerned about empire, his empire, his wealth, his power, his control, his ego.

In living as he did, in the stories he told, Jesus shows us a radically different way of being, a radically different view of what it means to rule and of what kingdom could be. Jesus' kingdom is not of this world, but of heaven. Jesus' rule is about justice and equity and compassion, not about retribution and cruelty. Jesus' rule is about all having what they need to survive and to thrive, not about the concentration of wealth and power. Jesus' rule is about serving, not about being catered to. Jesus' rule is about calling his followers friends and about making his enemies friends as well, not lording it over your sycophants and silencing opposition by whatever means necessary. And when all are friends, when all have what they need to thrive, when all have justice, when all are whole, when all are free, then there will be peace, and then there will be true joy.

The choice is, do we want to live under Putin or Xi, Kim Jong Un, the Ayatollah or the Donald, or do we want to live beside Jesus? Do we want to live under the kingdoms of this world, or in the kingdom of God?

When Jesus hung on the cross, between two condemned men, he said to one of them, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise." I believe that when we align ourselves (heart, mind, soul, and strength) with Jesus, we have found paradise -right here, right now. He is the King I want to serve, what about you?

