

The Rev. Joel Petruschke  
Our Saviour Lutheran Church  
Christ the King  
November 21, 2021

Let us pray...May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, for you are our strength and you are most certainly our redeemer. Amen.

Sisters and brothers in Christ, as was noted in the announcements, today the church observes the festival of Christ the King.

And Christ the King marks the last Sunday of the Church Year.

Today is the final Sunday of the Church Year.

For next week we begin a new Church Year with the First Sunday in Advent.

Next Sunday we transition from speaking of the coming of Christ the King at the end time to speaking about the coming of the Christ as the child of Bethlehem.

But before we get to Advent and Christmas and all the holiday season has to offer...

Before we get to next Sunday, we have the festival of Christ the King before us today.

And the festival of Christ the King is about the end time.

Christ the King is about Jesus who at the end time will reign as King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Christ the King is about the vision of God's plan at the end of human history.

Yes, at the end time Christ will reign victorious for all eternity.

And all our readings today allude to this vision.

From the reading in Daniel, we hear the prophet announce, "As I watched in the night visions, I saw one like a human being coming with the clouds of heaven. And he came to the Ancient One and was presented before him. To him was given dominion and glory and kingship, that all people, nations, and languages should serve him."

And again in Revelation, we read the words of John of Patmos, “Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come...Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of earth.”

And the psalmist in Psalm 93 declares, “The Lord is king, robed in majesty; the Lord is robed in majesty and armed with strength.”

And Jesus himself in our gospel reading gives witness to his sovereignty, while speaking to Pilate, “My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here.”

PAUSE

Now as much as this day on the Church calendar is about Christ who will be King of Kings and Lord of Lords at the end time.

As much as this day is about the coming Jesus, who will come on the clouds of heaven to reign for all time.

As much as this day is about King Jesus...

I find myself today thinking about Jesus’s subjects, that is those who are under Jesus’ authority, including you and I.

Yes, as I think about this Church festival today, I find myself thinking about the similarity of a human monarch who has subjects.

PAUSE

As Christians, we probably don’t think of ourselves as subjects.

As Christians, we are more likely to speak of ourselves as disciples.

As Christians, we are more likely to speak of ourselves as followers of Jesus.

We are more likely to speak of ourselves as persons who proclaim Jesus, such that we are witnesses to Jesus and to the His gospel.

So, we probably would hesitate to call ourselves “subjects.”

That sounds rather peculiar to our ears.

In fact, the framers of our U.S. Constitution were careful to remove such language about titles like king or queen.

Article 1, section 9 of the Constitution in fact says these words, “No Title of Nobility shall be granted by the United States: And no Person holding any Office of Profit or Trust under them, shall, without the Consent of the Congress, accept of any person, Emolument, Office, or Title, of any kind whatever, from any King, Prince or foreign State.”

Obviously, the frames of the Constitution were strongly reacting to the English government as they sought to become an independent nation.

In short, we are not familiar with language that bespeaks of a monarch and subjects.

We are not necessarily familiar with language that conveys the sense that we are under the authority or control of another.

That we are somehow subordinate, of lesser rank, of lesser importance.

The framers of the Constitution wanted to get away from that kind of mindset.

And yet today, on this festival of Christ the King, we are recognizing and even celebrating the fact that come the end time Christ will be King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

PAUSE

But Christ, of course, is a different kind of monarch.

For Christ is not kind of king who comes to lord it over his subjects.

Christ is not the kind of king who demeans or belittles his subjects, counting us as having lesser value.

Christ is not that kind of king.

No, the cross makes it quite plain that Christ is a different kind of king.

PAUSE

Now we recall that when Christ was crucified by the Romans they tacked a sign above Jesus’s head that read, “Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews.”

We sometimes see the letters INRI posted above Jesus on the cross.

These letters are an abbreviation of that title in Latin. A “J” in Latin appears as an “I.”

And “rex” is Latin for King, like the name Tyrannosaurus Rex, which means king of the lizards.

So “INRI” is an abbreviation for “Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews.”

And this sign posted above Jesus on the cross was probably meant to mock Jesus, so as to say that “Jesus was declaring himself to be king. Look at this king now.”

And in addition to serving to mock Jesus, the sign also served as notice to others.

Because he was declaring himself to be a king, Jesus was no doubt seen as attempting to usurp Roman authority.

And so the Romans were posting a warning to other would-be usurpers, telling them that you too will be crucified.

But irony about this sign is not lost on us who believe in Jesus Christ.

The irony is not lost on us, because we know Jesus is king.

And it is exactly because Jesus is crucified and raised from the dead that he will be King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

No, the irony is not lost on us.

The Romans, by their posting of a sign above Jesus, indeed give testimony to the sovereignty of Christ.

The Romans highlight the fact that Christ is king because of the cross.

You see, Friends, Jesus is not king because Jesus uses his authority to lord it over us.

Jesus is not king because Jesus exerts his power to keep us in check, like a human monarch might.

No, Jesus is king because Jesus is the one who becomes our servant, who dies on the cross so as to forgive us our sin and destroy the power of death.

PAUSE

And I would have us pause today to think about that for just a moment.

Think about that...Almighty God, the Creator of the universe, this omnipotent, all-powerful God we worship, humbles himself, taking on flesh in his Son Jesus Christ...

This omnipotent, all-powerful God, condescends to become one of us...

And this omnipotent, all-powerful God, becomes our servant, such as to die on the cross for us...

This omnipotent, all-powerful God takes the role of lowly subject, and this, this is why we celebrate this festival known as Christ the King.

Christ Jesus is an altogether different kind of king.

Christ Jesus is an altogether different kind of monarch.

His power and authority is displayed on a cross.

The power of God that reaches to the farthest extent of the universe is vividly displayed on this planet on a hill in Jerusalem on a cross.

And that divine power is servanthood.

PAUSE

So then, what *does* it mean for us to be Jesus' subjects?

If Jesus is King of Kings and Lord of Lords at the end time, and Jesus is king because of the cross, what does it mean to be his subjects?

What does being a subject of King Jesus look like?

PAUSE

The answer of course is this.

Being a subject of King Jesus looks like servanthood.

Being a subject looks like Jesus himself who was our servant.

Makes sense, right? But I want to qualify this somewhat.

We have heard this countless times before, right? That we are to love and serve others because Christ first loved and served us.

Being a Christian, being a follower of Christ is to be a servant.

We are sitting there no doubt, thinking, “Heard this already, many, many times before.”

And so, like I said, I want to qualify this statement.

Being a subject of King Jesus is not just being a servant, but it is about being grateful to be a servant.

For you see, it is one thing to serve others begrudgingly.

It is one thing to serve others because we feel we have to do it, because we feel we are obligated, because we feel we are compelled to do so.

It is one thing to serve with a sense of resentment for having to do so.

But it is another thing altogether to serve because we want to.

It is another thing to serve because we get to.

It is another thing to serve because we recognize the truly blessed gift that is God serves us.

And for me this is the truth of which Jesus speaks in our gospel lesson.

Jesus says, “I came into the world to testify to the truth.”

And the truth is that our omnipotent, all-powerful God, Creator of the universe, is a servant who has served each and everyone us by creating us, sustaining us each and every day, and by redeeming us through his Son on the cross.

That is the truth, that God in the most profound way serves you and me.

And, thus we are to serve with profound thanks, not begrudgingly, not because we feel obligated, but simply because we are so very thankful.

PAUSE

Indeed, there may be a reason why this festival of Christ the King falls on the church calendar around the holiday of Thanksgiving.

There may be a reason why Christ the King and Thanksgiving appear so close on the calendar.

Now, I am sure that when Congress passed a joint resolution whereby Thanksgiving would be celebrated on the fourth Thursday of November, and Franklin Delano Roosevelt subsequently signed the bill into law on December 26, 1941...

I am sure that neither those members of Congress nor the President had any thought of how Christ the King and Thanksgiving might be related.

But, I have to believe that God was working God's grace.

For I believe that maybe the best thing for us to be thankful for as people is the truth that God is a servant.

Out of great love, God has created, sustained, and redeemed all the world.

God loves to serve. And again, this is why the Lord God is king.

And I would so then remind us that to be true servants of God, to be true subjects of our Lord and King, is to be persons who love to serve, who are thankful to serve, who are overcome with delight to serve.

And my prayer then, and I think it is God's foremost desire, is that when we gather around their Thanksgiving tables, and we go around the table naming that for which we are thankful...

I think it is God's foremost desire, and it is my prayer, that God's people, that we, would express our thanks for the truth, that God is such a good and gracious God who serves, and that we then would in abundant thanksgiving continue to embrace a servant attitude.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

