

Sermon for Proper 29B (Christ the King)  
Sunday, November 20, 2022  
“Not of this world”

Text: Luke 23:35-43; Colossians 1:11-20

I speak to you in the name of the one true God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

One of the most dramatic moments for me this year occurred immediately following the death of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II when I heard people sing “God Save the King” live for the first time. Most people living today had only heard “God Save the Queen” as the national anthem of the United Kingdom. The days that followed were full of pageantry not seen in seventy years and never before seen with such minute-by-minute news coverage. People around the world celebrated the life of the most famous monarch on the planet whose reign as head of state spanned the entire globe. That glorious reign had come to an end, and there was a new king. Even for those of us who are not nor have ever been a subject of the Crown of the United Kingdom, one couldn’t help getting caught up in the majesty and magnificence of it all, and the world will experience equally as mind-blowing pomp and pageantry yet again six months from now when Charles III is officially crowned as king. It will be a sight to behold. He will be crowned as king over a vast realm and worldwide commonwealth. He will also be crowned as Defender of the Faith and Supreme Governor of the Church of England, and as such, despite all the attention, respect, and celebration directed toward him, the earthly king of a great earthly kingdom, he will know that there is a king greater than he of a kingdom greater than his of whom even he is a subject. That king is Christ the King.

From its earliest days, the Church has known this. St. Cyril of Alexandria wrote in the Fifth Century: “[Christ] has dominion over all creatures, a dominion not seized by violence nor usurped, but his by essence and by nature. His kingship is founded upon the hypostatic union. From this it follows not only that Christ is to be adored by angels and men, but that to him as man angels and men are subject, and must recognize his empire; by reason of the hypostatic union Christ has power over all creatures.” The hypostatic union is how the Church describes Jesus the Christ as fully human and fully divine, equally and at all times, one with the triune God, so that when we see Christ, we see God; when we see the Redeemer, we also see the Creator. St. Paul wrote in his letter to the Colossians that “he is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together.”

Today’s feast or solemnity was instituted in 1925 by Pope Pius XI at a time when Europe was still recovering from the devastation of the first World War that had ended seven years before, but when nationalism and secularism was on the rise in Europe. People began to doubt the existence of God, of Christ, of his authority over humanity, and the church’s ability to assert Christ’s authority. The Solemnity of Christ the King

was instituted in order to help restore confidence in the Church and faith that Jesus Christ is the King of kings and Lord of lords. The world was in increasing tension, the wealthy and powerful gained more and more power in order to push forward their ideas and political agendas. People were becoming more violent with each other, and the poor and marginalized were being ignored more and more. Looking around at the state of the world and of our nation today, it seems that little has changed, or we have once again ended up in a similar situation. Tensions today are high. I just read about yet another tragic shooting in public where five people were killed when someone opened fire in a gay bar just a few hours ago. Hatred and disrespect for others continues to fester. Political leaders refuse to listen to or work with each other. People care only about themselves and their personal needs. We need Christ's kingship more now than ever. We need Christ's power to transform us into better people and more devoted servants.

Today's Gospel lesson comes from the final moments of Jesus's earthly life, as he hung on the cross between two criminals, one of them recognized Jesus as king and implored him to be remembered when Jesus came into his kingdom. Jesus is no ordinary king and God's kingdom is not like the kingdoms and nations of this world. When we think of human leaders, we think of institutions that use their might, brute force, or perhaps even advanced military skill, to assert their power in the world. But Jesus's Kingdom is not of this world. It is God's Kingdom and it doesn't run on violence, force, or military might; it is a kingdom of love, respect, and highest honor directed at God himself. In our world today, it seems that the powers of the world and the forces of evil and darkness are winning: violence is in our streets, terrorist attacks continue across the globe and here at home, famine, drought, extreme poverty, racial tensions, disagreements over acceptance of another's sexuality or gender identity, mistrust of the government, mistrust of the institutions and doctrines of democracy that we hold dear, disrespect of law enforcement officers, disrespect of each other. Our human instinct would be to confront these troubles with aggression, and sometimes people need that intense a response to realize that their methods of maintaining power need changing—after all Jesus did knock tables over in the temple to alert the money changers that they were desecrating the temple. But God's Kingdom is not of this world. Christ is no ordinary king and his kingship does not lead by tyranny and terrorism. It is a kingship that leads with peace and love. In his book *Where do we go from here: Chaos or Community?*, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote:

“The ultimate weakness of violence is that it is a descending spiral, begetting the very thing it seeks to destroy. Instead of diminishing evil, it multiplies it. Through violence you may murder the liar, but you cannot murder the lie, nor establish the truth. Through violence you may murder the hater, but you do not murder hate. In fact, violence merely increases hate. So it goes. Returning violence for violence multiplies violence, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot drive out darkness: only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate: only love can do that.”

When Pope Pius XI instituted today's solemnity, he offered these words of inspiration: "If to Christ our Lord is given all power in heaven and on earth; if all men, purchased by his precious blood, are by a new right subjected to his dominion; if this power embraces all men, it must be clear that not one of our faculties is exempt from his empire. He must reign in our minds, which should assent with perfect submission and firm belief to revealed truths and to the doctrines of Christ. He must reign in our wills, which should obey the laws and precepts of God. He must reign in our hearts, which should spurn natural desires and love God above all things, and cleave to him alone. He must reign in our bodies and in our members, which should serve as instruments for the interior sanctification of our souls, or to use the words of the Apostle Paul, as instruments of justice unto God."

We, the Church, are the people of God, are charged with bringing about the kingdom of God. It's up to us to proclaim and testify to the Reign of Christ in the world. If we don't, who will? We are witnesses to the One who demonstrated power through weakness, manifested strength through vulnerability, established justice through mercy, and embraced a chaotic, violent world, took its pain into his own body, died a human death, and rose again to remind us that light is stronger than darkness, love is stronger than hate, and that with God, all good things are possible. Centuries before, the Prophet Daniel made the prophetic declaration: "To him was given dominion and glory and kingship, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, and his kingship is one that shall never be destroyed."

We must be witnesses to the truth that is in Jesus Christ. We must tell the world just how good God has been to us, that he will never let us down, and that his love and mercy are bigger than anyone in power on earth. Even when it seems that the powers have won—Pilate thought he had won—we must declare that Christ is the true victor. And we must have the courage to do live into the reign of Christ as God would have it: rooted, cemented in peace and love. We must go forth into the world as his soldiers of peace and love and excite others to declare Christ as King, too. Amen.

#### Resources

"Feast of Christ the King," [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Feast\\_of\\_Christ\\_the\\_King](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Feast_of_Christ_the_King)

"Christ the King Sunday," <http://www.churchyear.net/ctksunday.html>

David Lose, ...*In the Meantime*, <http://www.davidlose.net/2015/11/christ-the-king-b-not-of-this-world/>

<https://centeronconscience.org/martin-luther-king-jr/>