

Sermon: Reign of Christ Sunday- November 24<sup>th</sup>, 2019

Let us pray, “Lord speak to us in this time of worship, let your word for our lives settle upon our ears and move us to action in the light of your love. For we have gathered this day to be inspired by you, O God, to be filled with your grace and love and so we offer our prayers, our hymns, our fellowship, and I offer the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts, and may they be acceptable unto you our redeemer. Amen.

I sometimes feel like a bit of broken record on reign of Christ or Christ the King Sunday, because I often share the exact same story every year. I think its important to note for all of us, how and when this feast day began; because the message and the intent of this day in the church still echoes in the halls of our lives, as something that needs to be recognized and followed. You may remember from years past that Christ the King or Reign of Christ Sunday began as a response by Pope Pius XI to what he saw as the threat of growing secularism in society and in the church. I didn’t know Pope Pius, as I was not alive in 1925, but when we first hear those words, “the growing threat of secularism,” what often comes to our minds, at least it does to mine, is that this man of the church, was worried about why people had stopped sitting in the pews.

But that is not what Pope Pius was worried about, nor intended this feast day to be in response to. In 1925 Pope Pius felt that he needed to encourage the people of the church particularly in Italy but also around the world, and remind them in the ever-growing political climate that would lead to the horrors of World War II, a political climate filled with hatred, hypocrisy, bigotry and racism that Christ’s reign, Christ’s Kingship was different then the “kings” of the day. He wanted to remind the people then, that the Kingdom of God was and always would be a kingdom built upon a foundation of grace, compassion and unconditional love; that Christ was not a dictator that was worried about himself, but a

prince of peace who concern was for his people. Included in that importantly was the notion that Kingdom was one that we must be the agents of grace, compassion and love.

That was his intent; not to get people out of the hockey rink or out of the malls and back into the church, but more so to respond to the gathering storm that was the politic climate at that time, which looked, and as we know did become, one in which the wants, opinions and greed of a few, destroyed the lives of so many. What is hard to realize though, is that 94 years later, the message of this feast day remains as important today, then as it was when Pope Pius XI enacted it in 1925. It not only saddens me, but angers me greatly that we still live in a world where every type of ism that you can imagine is rampant, that we live in a world that is filled with endless acts of violence and degradation, that we live in a world where so many are still considered to be outcasts and unlovable and are judged by their neighbours to be unfit for Gods kingdom. It saddens me and angers me that in the year 2019 that we still desperately need to learn that the foundation of love and compassion as modeled by our King and our Saviour, calls to us to stand up and to make our voices heard and actions known in the face of all of these horrible things. It angers me that we must teach our children to be kind and good, because so much of what they see is not.

In some Christian traditions Reign of Christ Sunday comes on a different day in the calendar year than this one, but for us, as a mainline protestant tradition who follows the revised common lectionary, Reign of Christ Sunday or Christ the King Sunday is celebrated on this the New Years Eve of the church. And so as we prepare for the coming new year and as we prepare ourselves to enter into season of Advent, the time when we ready ourselves for Christ' coming; we pause on this New Years Eve in the church, to reflect upon the ways of Christ; to reflect once again upon his Kingship and to remind ourselves that we as the followers of Christ are tasked with the work of the kingdom in the here and the now.

But you know what's interesting how we define kingship and how we imagine Christ to be, changes how we might act in the world. I wonder how, given the chance, each of you would describe Christ to me today? What words would you use to describe our Lord? The members of the confirmation class will get the opportunity to do this today, which is why this idea came to my mind. You see last year I around this time I asked my children to describe to me a king and I even quoted them in my sermon that day and I want to do that again. In response to the question of what a king was like They described the average fairy tale notion of a King, one that they have seen in books and movies; one that wears a golden crown, and is wealthy beyond measure, and has an enormous kingdom and has knights to protect him.

But what I found most interesting is that one of my sons included a perspective by adding that King's are usually mean, or greedy, and that they control the people around them with fear. When I pried a little harder and said, "Okay well what about Kings that are not mean?" he followed by saying, "Well then they are usually controlled by someone who is?" Thinking about that again it occurred to me that if that is the image of Christ the King that we hold onto to and live out, then it makes sense that kingdom of the now, our reality, our society is the way that it is; one where greed is overwhelming and caring for another quite often takes the back seat, to caring for ourselves. Which is what I think Pope Pius was concerned about, because the rhetoric that he was hearing in the church, was the same rhetoric that was being used to drum up support for misguided opinions. The image of Christ as an all-powerful king, with a golden crown and sceptre, surrounded by streets paved in Gold, fits prosperity theology so well and allows us to be selfish, consumed with our own wealth and well being. If the image of Christ the King we hold is a king of the fairy tales we read, then there is no doubt for why greed is so prominent, that self preservation is the norm. Because if we see Christ in that way, we then will follow suit.

But what happens if we start to see Christ as a different sort of King, or having a different reign. You see when I read scripture what I hear about Jesus Christ is this. That he was man born into humble beginnings. A man who as a baby was laid in a manger because there was no room for him anywhere else. A man who sat down in the dirt with people who were hurting. A man that waded into the waters of the Jordan to be baptized by another, not claiming he was the only way. A man that challenged the status quo, challenge the perceived notions of God as a judge and harsh ruler and encouraged people to think of God as a loving parent. A man who was not afraid to eat, drink, fellowship and converse with those others said were unclean, a man willing to share time with lepers and those scarred by the world. A man who actually listened, maybe offered laughter, play with children, kick the dust of the road because it looked cool. A man, who as colleague of mine once said, was the type of person “that would sit down next to you and say “how are you today, my friend?” and actually mean it. He was man willing to lay down his life, to explaining the most truthful meaning of love.

If that is the imagine of Christ our king, how different the kingdom becomes. If the image of Christ our King is an image of him covered in gold, then gold is what we seek; yet if the image of Christ our king is covered in grace, then grace becomes that which we seek to attain. If the image of Christ our king, is simply a judge who determines right and wrong, with no thought or concerns for each situation and casts the wrong into torment, then we follow suit learning and embracing that there is one way and one way only. But if Christ our King is one who will sit with those broken by the world, will listen and care for what has taken place, then we learn to ere on the side of compassion. If the image of Christ our king, is an all-powerful ruler who is unapproachable and beyond our reach, then we simply do not even try. But if our image of Christ our king is a friend sitting across the table asking how we are, then we live to offer that care to others.

I believe how we perceive the world, how we experience the world, how we imagine the world to be, often correlates to how we respond to it. If all I sense around me is harshness, then I will be harsh.

Which is why, I believe, Pope Pius XI wanted the church to lift up the reign of Christ. For to do so was to paint the world a new image of what it meant to be a King and thus would change the response of what it means to live and work within the Kingdom. What Pope Pius wanted was for the people of the church was for them to see the good, the love, the compassion, the promise of peace and joy, found in the image of a king who sat with lepers and the disenfranchised and offered hope; he wanted for that image to be the norm, rather than the ideal. And when that was the picture of Christ we held to; it then is how we in turn respond to the world.

Next Sunday we will begin a new church year. The season of Advent will have begun and we all will be in the throws of getting ready for the coming of Christmas. But let us not forget that the babe in the manger that we celebrate grows to become a king, a king who did not care about wealth or status or power, but instead cared deeply about what it meant to love, to have hope, to live in peace and joy, to respond to the world around him in compassion and grace, and as followers of that King, in the Kingdom of the now, so should we. Last night I read a post on Facebook which I found quite fitting. The post read my wife and I often talk about what we would do if we knew that we had one more day to live. What would we eat? What would we want to experience? Interestingly, Jesus was given that chance, he knew that he had a limited amount of time left, and what did he do, well he knelt down and washed people feet. That is a servant King, that is the kingdom that we are asked to reflect. May it be so. Amen,