Christ the King Sunday. Nov. 24, 2024. Faith Episcopal Church, Poulsbo, WA. 2 Samuel 23:1-7; Psalm 132:1-13; Revelation 1:4b-8; John 18:33-37.

The Gospel

Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, 'Are you the King of the Jews?'[34]Jesus answered, 'Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?'[35]Pilate replied, 'I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?'[36]Jesus answered, '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.'[37]Pilate asked him, 'So you are a king?' Jesus answered, 'You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.'

The Sermon

Christ the King Sunday is an odd festival! Jesus called himself the Light of the World, the Son of Man, the Bread of Life, the Good Shepherd, the Vine, the Way, the Truth and the Life, but never the King.

WHO called Jesus king? Pontius Pilate! The weak, worried, tormented and cruel Roman ruler whose name we repeat whenever we declare our faith in the words of the ancient creeds, "crucified, suffered under Pontius Pilate."

It was Pontius Pilate who ordered the sign placed above Jesus' head on the cross: "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews." So it is ODD that we align ourselves with Pontius Pilate in the hymns of today's festival, calling Jesus a KING.

All summer we have heard stories of Jesus healing people, stilling storms, feeding thousands. Yet, he is a servant, a man without a home of his own, a washer of feet. We may want him to be a king, we may want his glory to reflect on us his followers, but every time the people tried to make him an earthly king, he quickly left them.

During the past campaign season, thousands of people gathered to be near the one they thought might be the future president. I still remember being "this close" to Bill Clinton at an event years ago. These public figures whose

attention we covet, are, for all intents and purposes, inaccessible to us. They are beyond our reach.

Sometimes even Jesus feels beyond our reach. We want to feel that he is really here with us and that our faith is based on something real and personal.

Chloe's church teacher was trying to teach her class that God is everywhere. "High on a mountain, deep in a sea, God lives up in heaven, and God lives in you and me," she said. That's when little Chloe piped up, "Well God sure hides good!"

Sometimes God seems hidden. Mountains and sea and heaven so remote, our hearts perhaps even more so. We cry out and ask, "Where are you, God?"

That is the cry of people across our nation who suffer storm and political disappointment. This is the cry of people in Haiti, Sudan, Gaza, Israel, the Ukraine, in the homes of people who are hungry or in the cars and tents of people without addresses. When the rain and wind let loose, where was God? When my children cried for food, where was God?

That may have been the question on the mind of the thief crucified next to Jesus. Where was God? But God was closer than he knew! He asked Jesus to remember him when he came into his kingdom. Jesus' answer, "Today you will be with me in paradise," is his answer to us also. You and I live each day with our own yearnings, brokenness, hopes and troubles -- yet, we too are offered paradise: life in God's realm, God's kingdom – today!

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Next Sunday we begin the season of Advent leading us to Christmas. We will ponder the everyday event of a young woman waiting through an unexpected pregnancy for the birth of a child. As in many of the stories of Jesus, this shows God's amazing way of turning things upside down, of surprising us with the unexpected. Jesus is born to poor people among animals. Yet kings bring him treasure and worship him. We call him God's Word made flesh!

It's a story for everyday. Everyday with a glimpse of glory. When Jesus offers paradise to the thief, he reminds us of God's deadly earnest desire for us to live an abundant life. Jesus' proclamation doesn't come from a faraway throne. It doesn't come from the stores in Silverdale, or from the White House, or from the top of the highest mountain. Our King's promises are proclaimed from the cross. Battered, broken, giving his life. And before that,

walking the earth along with all the battered, broken and sick, offering healing and hope.

Jesus has been present across the country this month as people gathered up groceries for thanksgiving baskets for needy families. He will be present among you when you sit down on Thursday to say a prayer of thanksgiving among family or friends. He will be a guest when you serve Thanksgiving Dinner tomorrow to our Monday guests.

He pops up in the voice of a friend, a child, a customer, a nurse, a cleaning person, an electrician.

Our King invites us close, invites us to share bread and wine with him every week, invites us to walk with him every day, invites us to share his life, death and, yes, his resurrection. Hold fast to his words of comfort, forgiveness and encouragement.

Receive the meal – the tiny bite of bread he gave us to eat in remembrance of him, for the healing of our wounds and the strengthening of lives, for our sustenance along life's journey – real, close and personal. For your journey from now till tonight, or from Monday to Friday, or from now till your next doctor's appointment, or from now till your next pressing personal issue is resolved. He is there to walk with you through this life, calling you to inner peace and from there to love of one another.

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Garrison Keillor attends an Episcopal church in New York City. He recently wrote, "I don't go to church because I'm a good person. I'm not… No, I only know how to imitate goodness, and when I sit in church and say the prayers and sing the hymns and listen to Scripture, it takes me out of the world and into the universe. And I feel united to the people around me, young, old, men, women, Black, white, all of us fragile, mortal, heading in the same direction."[1]

Being together in church may take us for a few moments "out of the world," yet being together in church places us right in the midst of the world with the people around us.

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Walt Wangerin was showing his daughter Mary around St. Patrick's cathedral in New York City. They admired the stained-glass windows, the high ceiling,

[1] Garrison Keillor and Friends newsletter,11/22 2024, "What's on my mind sitting here"

the organ, the 14 stone statues of Jesus on his way to the cross. As they walked, they noticed an old woman, small and gray and hunched all out of proportion. As she limped slowly, she dragged a bag made from an old pillowcase. Mary kept asking her father, "So where IS Jesus?"

The old woman crept past them into a side chapel, dipped her finger into the holy water, genuflected and moved to the altar rail where she slowly sank to one knee. After a few minutes she rose and labored to the exit, never raising her eyes, turned back to genuflect once again before continuing her slow and sorrowful walk. "Where IS Jesus?" asked Mary once again.

"There, Mary, there in that woman," said her father.

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Jesus said we would find him in the "least of my brothers and sisters."

We may happily confess with <u>words</u> that "Jesus is my Lord and King," but we are also called to confess with our <u>lives</u>, "Jesus is my Lord and King." That's what you do when you offer your money, time and giftedness to your congregation, to the people around you, when you see Jesus in one another, and give to the people across the world whom we dare not forget.

We Americans don't know much about living under a king or even a lord. But might we imagine what living under Christ's reign of peace might mean? Might we dream of the day when war and violence of all kinds is halted? Might we dream of the day when first-world countries stop being afraid and become exceedingly generous? If instead of spending money on weapons, we spent it on justice: on food and medicine and education here AND in the rest of the world? Our countries would be so admired and respected that no one would dare to attack us. Are these dreams unrealistic because most of us feel safer living under Pontius Pilate's rule of power rather than under Jesus' reign of love?

Pontius Pilate loved transient earthly glory. But there is nothing more glorious than this: that the King of the Universe humbles himself to be born among us, to live and die and work ceaselessly for our well-being. Our King is not far off and remote, but accessible and close as breath. Real and personal!

Jesus' heavenly grace and glory call us "out of the world and into the universe" AND to care for the smallest child, the poorest among us, the old woman in the cathedral -- and to encourage one another. Amen.