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Ezekiel 34: 11 – 16, 20 – 24
Ephesians 1: 15 – 23Ps. 100
Matthew 25: 31 – 46

It was 1925 and Mussolini and fascism were gaining power in Italy. Pope Pius XI thought it was time to remind the world – and some of its leaders in particular – that, ultimately, it is Christ who is King of Kings and Lord of Lords. So, Pope Pius XI established Christ the King Sunday as the last Sunday in the Church year, which is today.

Reportedly, Mark Twain said that ‘History doesn’t repeat itself, but it rhymes.’ As in probably every age, we need to be reminded again (and again) that whatever political powers are holding sway, it is ultimately God who is in control. As we head into Advent and anticipate both the future coming and the coming-once-again of Christ, it is a fitting reminder – and comfort – that the power, the glory and the honor belong to Him for whom we wait, and to no one else.

But who is this “King of Kings and Lord of Lords” really? And what does this mean for us in the 21st century who are not all that familiar with sheep and goats, let alone Kings and Lords? If we go back to the very beginnings of our faith, Christianity starts when people first say, “Jesus is Lord.” It is a basic creedal affirmation of Jesus’ identity. But it is also immediately obvious to Jesus’ early followers that while Jesus is Lord, Jesus is also not Caesar, the one who holds earthly sway over their lives. During Jesus’ trial, Pilate asks Jesus, “Are you the King of the Jews?” and to which Jesus responds, “You say that I am.” Do Jesus’ disciples think of him as a King? Does Pilate? Does Jesus think of himself as King? We, of course, can’t actually answer any of those questions. But if we are celebrating Christ as King, then what do we mean by it?

What Jesus preached, and what the early Church believed and practiced, were actually subversive to the rule of government and the Roman empire. But as time went by, and especially when Constantine came along, Christianity was co-opted into the power of the Empire. That is something with which the Church has struggled ever since, including now. During the Middle Ages, the ‘divine right of kings’ was barely questioned - *of course* a monarch was not subject to any earthly authority or to the will of the people! Only God could judge an unjust ruler (which is, of course, exactly what both the prophet, Ezekiel, and Jesus are doing in our readings for today).

By the time of the Reformation in Europe in the 16th century, it seemed perfectly normal that countries should be divided between Protestant and Roman Catholic, based on the faith of their monarch. All too often, the Church has forgotten to whom we owe our allegiance. We have participated in the political machinations of life in this world, in the games that divide us into those with power and those without. If we, the Church, are to recognize Christ as King, we must first relinquish our interest in worldly power.

If we say that Christ is King, then why is the world as it is? If Christ is King, why is there so much violence and terrorism around the world, and in our own country? If Christ is King, why are millions of people, especially right now in Yemen, starving to death while those of us in the affluent part of the world throw away tons of food daily? If Christ is King, then why are there so many tyrannical despots and heartless dictators in power? If Christ is King, then why is the rate of destruction of ‘this fragile earth, our island home’ approaching a point of no return? IS Christ King? As the Rev. Kay Sylvester

writes, 'either [Jesus] Christ is NOT king, or he's a neglectful king, or we're talking about a reality that is hidden behind the everyday reality that we read and hear about in the news.

Jesus suggests in today's Gospel from Matthew that there is indeed a hiddenness to the Kingdom of God. "When was it Lord?" both the doers and the non-doers ask. The Kingdom has not been recognizable to either camp. Whether or not they have fed or clothed or visited the needy, there is an element of surprise that Jesus has been present.

So often in the Gospels, Jesus presents the Kingdom as all around us and yet hidden. It is a treasure hidden in a field. It is a lost coin or a lost son. The Kingdom of God is present, and yet somehow concealed by human activity in the world, or simply unnoticed. The people to whom Jesus ministers – the sick, the disenfranchised, those on the margins – are not in the field of vision of most people, and especially the powers-that-be. In Jesus' post-resurrection appearances, the reality of his presence is obscured until his followers learn to see with the eyes of faith. Over and over again, Jesus tells his followers – us – that we will see and enjoy the Kingdom when we learn to serve the least of these, when we learn to care for Creation and when we learn to speak God's Truth to power.

If we read Matthew carefully, we also begin to perceive that many of those who participate in the Kingdom, perhaps most, are from the fringes of Israel's society. Those who see and accept what Jesus has to offer include tax collectors, the blind who then see, a Roman centurion, the Canaanite woman, the leprous and those with unclean spirits. They are the ones who get it! Jesus has chosen fishers and ordinary people, not trained Scribes or people from Herod's court, to be his disciples. There couldn't possibly be a more mirror-image caricature of the world's power structure than this carpenter from the back woods of Galilee and his rag-tag bunch of followers. Hardly the people who could make a dent in the world, right? Why do they choose to follow Jesus? Perhaps because they realize that he is their only hope in a world balanced on their backs. Perhaps the more important question is, why do WE choose to follow him?

When did we see you hungry/thirsty/a stranger/naked/sick/or in prison Lord? Despite the Church's presence in the last two millenia, time and 'progress' have only exacerbated the neediness of people in this world.

- "Hungry" now means that more than a billion people go to sleep every night with little or no food. One in five children in this country are in that category.
- "Thirsty" means that concurrent with our watering our lawns, taking long, hot showers and washing our cars, millions of people are dealing with severe drought and famine, or have no water to drink that isn't infested with sewage, toxins, or disease.
- "A Stranger" means that millions of refugees flee persecution and perhaps torture, risking their lives in flimsy rubber rafts or climbing over barbed wire and concrete fences.
- "Naked" means freezing to death in the winter on the sidewalks of cities for lack of warm clothing or proper shelter, and dying of heat exhaustion for lack of proper shelter in summer.
- "Sick" means no access to life-saving vaccines and medications, and susceptibility to ebola or other crises in developing countries, or, in this country, no healthcare coverage in order to seek routine preventative care and treatment.

- “In Prison” means prisons that are overcrowded, and a judicial system that is often prone to bias on racial or socio-economic lines, or torture and death in places with repressive regimes.

In listening to the news, it is sometimes incredibly difficult to believe, let alone see, that the Kingdom of God is really all around us. The brokenness of this world can be overwhelming. It is hard to see that the Kingship of Christ has made any difference in this world. But then, perhaps Jesus would say to us (present tense), “Where are *you* when I am hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison?” Perhaps Jesus would ask us, “Who – or what – is *really* your King?”

Our call, our purpose, as followers of Jesus, has not changed in the last two millenia. If we dare to call ourselves Christians, if we dare to call Christ “King,” then we must behave as citizens of Christ’s Kingdom. As the Body of Christ, we are called to embody the heart of Christ in loving others, the hands and feet of Christ in serving others, and the words and the Truth of Christ is confronting those who have the power to change the world. Again, in the words of the Rev. Kay Sylvester, today on Christ the King Sunday, we affirm two things: that Christ is King of heaven and of earth, and that what we do and the choices we make matter very, very much.

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