

## **Christ the King Sunday**

\*Last Sunday after Pentecost, Year A, November 26, 2023

Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24; Psalm 100; Ephesians 1:15-23;

Matthew 25:31-46

St. Matthew's, Sunbury; The Reverend Dina Carter Ishler,  
Priest in Charge

**Awake, my soul, and sing! Of him who died for thee,  
and hail him as thy matchless King through all eternity.**

*In the name of God~ Creator, Redeemer, Sanctifier, Amen.*

When I was growing up, and then again when our children were little, we made New Year's Eve a festive occasion- festively appropriate for children, anyway. Do any of you remember those inexpensive party hats you could buy in the five and dime store- or today in the Dollar General, probably- and those little metal noisemakers you could shake or horns you could blow? Every year we took them out of their dusty box in the basement so we could have some fun with them, jumping around the family room, calling up unsuspecting relatives to scream "Happy New Year!" in their ear and throwing

open the front door to make a raucous noise at midnight. New Year's Eve seems to call out for some kind of celebratory excess- parties, dance music, staying up way past your bedtime- as a fitting send-off for an old year and a welcome for the new.

Today's celebration of what we have named Christ the King Sunday- this final Sunday of the church year- can feel appropriately like New Year's Eve- festive and flashy, with hymns that are glorious both in music and text such as today's opening hymn "Crown him with many crowns". It is a feast that feels larger than life, where we meet Jesus through language that speaks of power and strength and might: he is the Lamb upon the throne, both the Son of God and the Son of Man, reigning triumphant over all of Creation both now and throughout all eternity. Jesus' victory over death upon the Cross is proclaimed by all in Heaven and on Earth with the all the

pomp and majesty we can muster. It is a Transfiguration experience- one of those mountaintop, in-your-face encounters with the living God that dazzle us among the more ordinary yet equally lovely moments that we share together in our church year. For those of us who are old enough to remember the original Wizard of Oz movie, it is like that sudden bursting into Technicolor that Dorothy experienced when she landed in Oz- everything is vivid and almost glaringly bright.

Spiritual moments or even seasons like this, full of glorious intensity, are essential to how we tell and understand our own stories. That indescribable feeling when we fall in love or see a child born, weddings and baptisms and ordinations when we make big promises surrounded by loving community, those transcendent experiences when we know with certainty that God is closer to us than our own breath- these are the high notes of the song that is our life, soaring above the quieter but

no less real moments that are equally necessary to the wholeness of our stories. It can be tempting, like Peter at the Transfiguration, to want to linger in our own mountaintop experiences- soaking up all the amazement and wonder of the Divine breaking through into our everyday lives and grabbing our attention. We seek to live in Oz rather than Kansas, to hoard all this glory and wonder, rather than freeing it to flow into every corner of our existence to bless and transform ourselves and others in ways we cannot yet imagine.

Beloveds, we need **both** ways of being. This is when that ‘both/and’ of our Anglican tradition comes to our aid- we can hold in tension two completely different realities and draw lifegiving wisdom from both. We need the constantly shifting rhythm of the church year, where the glorious heights of our soul alternate with the gentler and more tender moments to feed us and guide us into a deeper understanding of all that God is to us. Our spiritual

and liturgical lives are blessed by transitions like today, when we will turn the corner from all the glorious language of victory and triumph to find ourselves immediately in the quieter and more contemplative season of Advent. This King we seek awaits a birth among us as *one of us*- the One whom, in the words of the apostle Paul “is seated at God’s right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion”- he will be most fully known in all the vulnerability and fragility of what it means to be human.

In today’s readings, both these realities live side by side as together they paint a picture of what this kingship really looks like. From the prophet Ezekiel: “Thus says the Lord God: I myself will search for my sheep- I will rescue them from all the places to which they have been scattered. I will feed them by the watercourses, in rich pasture...I will seek the lost and bind up the injured and feed them with justice.” In psalm

100, this is the foundation of why we sing our praises to God: “Know this: The Lord himself is God; he himself has made us, and we are his; we are his people and the sheep of his pasture. Enter his gates with thanksgiving...give thanks to him and call upon his name.” And then in our Gospel both parts come together, the glorious and the tender: “When the Son of Man comes, and all the angels with him, he will sit on the throne of his glory, and all the nations will be gathered before him.” And those who will inherit the kingdom prepared from the foundation of the world- meaning those who will know the fullness of God’s presence and intimacy of relationship- will be those who have cared for others: offering food, clean water, and clothing; tending and visiting the sick and those in prison. It is how we have treated the least of this world that matters the most to this King of Glory- everything depends on how we have loved others, especially when we were unaware that in loving them we were actually loving God.

And perhaps the truest both/and of all, especially here on the doorstep of this Advent season, is that God's reign is both here and yet to come, all around us and not yet fully present, inviting our attention in both bold and quiet ways even as we await its fullness. We must cry out from our souls- like the thief on the Cross who begged "Lord, remember me!"- how much we long to be a part of this coming kingdom *and we must live right here and right now as if it is already fully present.* If we wait for a future moment to be present to this way of being, we will miss living into what it means to be God's people in this time and in this place. And we know we cannot do that, not if we believe that when this King returns he will ask us how we have treated the vulnerable among us- this One who knew every grief that we know and bears them all for us so that we might rest in him for always. Until that moment, we have work to do.

When we gather next Sunday it will be Advent, when we are called to meet Jesus in utter humility, through a birth so quiet it could easily be missed among the louder, more demanding moments of our lives. Our challenge is to be watchful enough that we do not miss the invitation, open to all the places he is waiting for us to find him: in our communal worship life, especially as we are fed in the Eucharist, in our private prayers, and in our life out in the world, building the kingdom one act of loving service at a time. As you know so well, holy community is not shaped only in those fleeting mountaintop experiences but across seasons of doing life together, of glorious moments and quieter ones, of faithfully building a foundation of listening and learning and growing where we make space for the Spirit to show up and transform us and through us, the world.



*And so I invite you- I challenge you- to wonder with me: how will you invite Christ the King to be born anew in you this coming Advent season? How will you invite this birth to help you live as Christ's person in this time and place? How can we- our St. Matthew's family- share ever more deeply in a communal life where God's grace and mercy and love will be shared and ever more deeply known?*

*Let us figure out the answers to this, together. Amen.*