

Kings and Kingdoms – November 22, 2009 – Christ the King Sunday
Revelation 1: 4b – 8; John 1: 43-51; John 18: 33-37

This Sunday is designated on the Christian calendar as Christ the King Sunday. Sometimes – and in some churches - this day is called the Feast of our Lord Jesus Christ the King.

It is not an ancient observance. It was first initiated by Pope Pius VI in 1925 - not that long ago - as a way for the Church to combat both the increasing lack of interest in faith and the growing tendencies of people of that time to invest their hopes on the technologies of that time. ...

It was immediately adopted by most Protestant churches; and it is always observed on the Sunday directly before Advent - that is to say, today.

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We - and by we I mean we Americans - are not all that comfortable with the whole idea of kings. On October 19, 1791, when the British formally surrendered to the American colonies at the battle of Yorktown ... and with that, ending the American Revolution... and with that, ending once and for all our relationship with any king, the British band marched on the battle field playing the popular ballad *The World Turned Upside Down*... and everyone present on that day knew precisely what that moment meant.

And to be honest, we - and by we I mean we Americans, again - we're not all that comfortable with **any kind** of authority. In 1775, before there was any flag with stars and stripes, the Marines carried a bright yellow flag with a rattlesnake on it and with these words, "don't tread on me." And that flag has been used – and that sentiment has been expressed - right up to the present day.

And in the classic motorcycle movie, *The Wild One*, the waitress Mildred asks the leader of the motorcycle gang Johnny, played by Marlon Brando, "Whaddya rebelling against, Johnny?" And Johnny's reply is, "Whaddya got?" And that pretty much sums up we American's attitude, both past and present, to any king, any boss, any public official, any bureaucrat, any figure of authority, or any lord.

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And yet we still manage - don't we? – almost reflexively, seemingly unwittingly - to find people... and places... and powers... and principalities... with which we will invest our time... at which we will spend all of our energies... to which we will donate much of our attention and our money...and for which we will pledge our honor, allegiance, and praise.

So before we all declare that we have no need of a king or that there is no lord of our lives, we may want to examine just how we spend our time, look at what we have decided is most important; and see what gets sacrificed when push comes to shove on Sunday morning.

In short, we may want to ask and answer this question: what for us is the more attractive and compelling Sunday option – sitting in some pew, singing and praying and hearing some message – or a buffet brunch with Bloody Marys – or simply sleeping in.

And this is by no means merely about some contest between going to church and doing anything else but going to church. It boils down to this: what – or who – or what things – or what powers and principalities – are the lords of our lives? **What – or who –governs you?**

Is it your appetite? Does your appetite rule over you; and, if so which appetite? Is it an appetite for food... or drink? Do you love to eat? Do you need to drink? Is food your best friend? Are you in love with comfort food? Does drink help you forget or relax or give you courage?

Or do you have an appetite for things? Are your conversations between people becoming increasingly limited to these few words – cash or charge, credit or debit, paper or plastic? Do you keep buying things that you know that you don't need but that you have convinced yourself that you just must have? Are you still struggling with the truth that you really can't have everything, for where would you put it?

Let me ask you this question... **What's the most important, the most central thing in your life - right now?**

Is it some favorite professional sports team? Or the hometown team? Or family and family gatherings – the newest grandkid, the favorite aunt, the grown up child in trouble? Is it a boyfriend or girl friend? Or the latest, hottest singer on the scene? The TV show that you must set aside time to watch?

Some of these people and things are precious and merit our time and attention... and some are not and do not. And all us know the difference.

Now let me ask you this question... **What idea, what point of view, or what emotion is governing your decision making - right now?** Do you think that most people are smarter than you - **or not as smart as you?** Are you angry at the way the country is going or how the whole world is drifting and do you know for certain who is to blame? Is shame the shadow in your life? Or anger? Or sorrow? Do you carry inside you a list of couldas, wouldas, and shouldas that leave you nearly paralyzed with regret?

People... places... ideas... emotions... fears... worries... teams and TV shows... celebrities... desires, appetites, needs, addictions... work, money, leisure, fashion, politics, money, did I already mention money? These are but a few of the lords of our lives. **So don't tell me we have a problem with authority.**

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The three passages of Scripture that we have heard this morning provide us with a brief but compelling glimpse of the lordship of Jesus the Christ. Listen again to the words that John reports in his revelation to the seven main churches at that time. Listen to how God is described. Then listen to how Jesus is described.

God is named as “who was, who is, and who is to come.” We cannot help but think of Jesus who we confess each time we receive communion as the one “who died, who is risen, and who will come again.”

Nothing - not people, not powers, not principalities - can defeat the power and purpose of the Almighty God and Christ the King. And nothing, not even those things which we from time to time privilege and honor above God will ever separate us from the love of God.

For what is the purpose of God? What is the work of Jesus Christ our King? Again from John's revelation... Jesus is the one "who loves us, who freed us from our sins by his blood, and who made us to be a kingdom, serving God."

The work of Jesus the Christ is love. The purpose of Jesus Christ is to draw us together, to create a kingdom, so that we may be followers of this king, this teacher, this prophet, this lord... so that we may be made perfect in love as God is perfect in love... so that we may become instruments of peace and justice and comfort and encouragement... so that we may become servants and foot soldiers in this in-breaking Kingdom.

In short, through the help of the Holy Spirit and through the grace of Jesus Christ and through the power of God the Father, we are invited – we are called by Christ Jesus - to turn the this broken world **upside down** and inside out - so that God's will is at last and fully done – on earth as it is in heaven.

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Near the end of John's Gospel, Jesus is asked by Pontius Pilate, "Are you King, or what? Are you the King of the Jews or are you the King of something or somewhere else? Are you a king?"

Jesus' answer is a wonderful description of Jesus' true kingdom. Jesus says, "Those who belong to the truth listen to my voice."

Friends, there is a kingdom breaking in; and it is supplanting and transforming all the current kingdoms and fiefdoms and territories of our lives. It is a kingdom created by and marked by grace and truth, for Jesus once dwelt among us, full of grace and truth, and still we knew him not.

And those who still know Him not, those have other lords in their lives may not hear Jesus' voice. Those who go chasing after other gods may not ever know his grace and truth.

There is a kingdom breaking in -a kingdom of life and beauty and truth - and Jesus has called us to be participants in this his kingdom.

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From the Church's earliest beginnings, faithful Christian thinkers have looked to the Bible and have identified the three functions - the three roles or three offices - of Jesus, both on earth and in heaven. These three roles are the following: **Jesus as prophet, Jesus as priest, and Jesus as king.**

What these three roles have in common is that these were the three roles that required anointing by the people and these were the only three functions that we see in the leaders of God's people. Moses was both priest and prophet. David was both prophet and king. Elijah lived out his function as prophet; and Solomon lived out his role as king.

In his role or function of prophet, Jesus teaches us through parables, Jesus reveals to us the will of God, and Jesus helps us to see the nature and character of God, saying, I am the way, the truth, and the life. Both when Jesus is baptized at the River Jordan and when Jesus is brought up to the unknown and unnamed mountain, God says of his Son Jesus to those who were present, “Listen to him.” And Peter, when people were deserting Jesus in great numbers, saw and named the truth in Jesus, when he asked Jesus, “Where else can we go? You have the words of eternal life. **This is Jesus as prophet.**

In his role or function as priest, it is as simple as this – it is through the blood of Jesus that we are saved. And still - and now - Jesus prays for us; Jesus speaks for us; Jesus removes the distance between we the sinner and the Almighty God. **This is Jesus as priest.**

But as king...in the office that Jesus has and with which we’re not so sure of... Jesus has conquered death and sin and evil. Jesus is the source of all that is good and necessary for all well-being. Jesus is both the head of the Church universal and lord of God’s kingdom.

As king, Jesus protects us, Jesus provides for us; and Jesus governs us, asking us to let him be the center of our lives - and freeing us to see beyond our current condition, past our present circumstance, beyond our most pressing needs - so that we may actually catch a glimpse of God’s power and glory.

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Say what you will about Nathaniel, soon to be a disciple of Jesus. He’s a tough cookie and not one to easily fall for the latest messiah that comes down the pike. When Phillip tells Nathaniel that he has found the Messiah and that the Messiah is from Nazareth, Nathaniel’s response is world weary and cynical, asking, what good could possibly come from such an obscure little village as Nazareth?

Phillip’s response should always be our response in introducing people to Jesus. “Come and see,” Phillip says.

When Jesus first encounters Nathaniel, Jesus surprises him by picking up on the conversation of which Jesus was not a part, and gently teasing Nathaniel, saying, “Look, finally someone from Israel who is without deceit, returning to Nathaniel the unfair characterization of Israel for the unfair slur on Nazareth.

When Nathaniel realizes that Jesus knew what had been in his heart, Nathaniel openly proclaims that Jesus is the Son of God and the king of Israel.

And Jesus’ reply? You think that’s impressive? You haven’t seen anything yet. You’ll see angels of god ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.”

Friends , we haven’t seen anything yet. We cannot begin to imagine what Jesus the Lord of all creation can do. Our hearts and minds simply cannot fully grasp the depth of his love or the abundance of his grace.

All that we can do is to take the advice that Jesus' mother Mary gave at the wedding party at Cana, when Jesus is asked to honor a request for more wine. Jesus gives some instructions to the waiters and wine stewards – and when they remain uncertain what they should do, Mary says, “Do whatever he tells you.”

“Do whatever he tells you.” Sounds like the best and proper response that we can make when we hear the voice and the call of Jesus our Lord, our Savior, and our King. **Amen.**