Introduction

King for a Day

Check-in & Introductions

Sermon Reflection Notes

This week we celebrate Christ the King Sunday. This celebration was created by Pope Pius XI in 1925 in response to secular events and movements that the Pope found concerning. He looked around at growing fascism, totalitarian regimes, and secularism and was appalled by what he saw happening. There was an uptick of churches beginning to place flags in sanctuaries; language about national pride, power, and the need for allegiance to the state was becoming more prevalent. Pope Pius XI wanted to counter turning one's country into an idol, an object of worship and adoration, and thus created Christ the King Sunday to remind us that our worship is reserved for Christ alone.

We are created to serve only one God, and we are called to serve with our whole selves. Secular allegiances have their place, but divine allegiances are transcendental. The scripture passage this week uses the language of shepherd, judge, and king to describe Christ, but Jesus is not a king in the secular sense. Christ is not a symbol of national power and pride; in fact, he lived in a society under the rule of the tyrant King Herod. Instead, we serve Jesus, a servant king, one focused on feeding the poor, healing the sick, and finding the lost and guiding them back into the community. This servant king invites us to be the kind of people who model our lives after his examples.

It's not unusual for kids to become "faithful sheep" right around Thanksgiving when they notice and remember that there is a big event happening in about month that they'd really like to go well for them. They follow the rules more, behave a little more sweetly, maybe even stop picking fights with their siblings quite so much. We do the same things. We remember, sometimes, to do good, to do no harm, to 'stay in love with God', but if we are honest, we forget frequently. We don't intentionally commit sins, but we also don't do what is right as consistently as we should. Because what we are called to do, what God wants from us is what Howard Thurman spoke of: *"The kingdom of God means that at the center of my life, at the nerve center of my consent, I affirm the priority of God in my life, and I manifest this sense of his priority in my actions, and in how I relate to other people."*

In the scripture passage, it is important to note that neither the sheep nor the goats did anything blatantly wrong. The sheep were surprised by the praise because they genuinely didn't know they were doing anything special. The goats were just as surprised because they tried to do right by themselves, their families, their friends. The difference is in how they approach the world, their world-view. The 'goats' show dignity to people who are like them. The 'sheep' see the God-given dignity and value of every human being. Jesus shows up with and in the marginalized. Jesus said *what you do, or don't do, for the least of these, you do to me.* Ultimately, it's not about fairness, or what is deserved, or retaliation. It's not enough to say things like "Look what they did to us…they deserve that punishment, that lack, that hardship." Jesus, very clearly, said "You are doing it to me." Christ required nothing short of a life surrendered in service of the King. Loving God. Loving neighbor…every neighbor. We will not ever be king or queen for a day. But we do get to represent and serve the King every day. Let our lives be living testaments to the servant King.

Scripture

Matthew 25: 31-46

31 "Now when the Human One comes in his majesty and all his angels are with him, he will sit
on his majestic throne. 32 All the nations will be gathered in front of him. He will separate them
from each other, just as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. 33 He will put the
sheep on his right side. But the goats he will put on his left.
34 "Then the king will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who will receive good things from
my Father. Inherit the kingdom that was prepared for you before the world began. 35 I was
hungry and you gave me food to eat. I was thirsty and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger
and you welcomed me. 36 I was naked and you gave me clothes to wear. I was sick and you
took care of me. I was in prison and you visited me.'
37 "Then those who are righteous will reply to him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and
feed you, or thirsty and give you a drink? 38 When did we see you as a stranger and welcome
you, or naked and give you clothes to wear? 39 When did we see you sick or in prison and visit
you?'
40 "Then the king will reply to them, 'I assure you that when you have done it for one of the
least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you have done it for me.'
41 "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Get away from me, you who will receive terrible things.
Go into the unending fire that has been prepared for the devil and his angels. 42 I was hungry
and you didn't give me food to eat. I was thirsty and you didn't give me anything to drink. 43 I
was a stranger and you didn't welcome me. I was naked and you didn't give me clothes to
wear. I was sick and in prison, and you didn't visit me.'
44 "Then they will reply, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or
sick or in prison and didn't do anything to help you?' 45 Then he will answer, 'I assure you that
when you haven't done it for one of the least of these, you haven't done it for me.' 46 And they
will go away into eternal punishment. But the righteous ones will go into eternal life."

Discussion Questions

1. Knowing the origin of a 'feast day' like Christ the King Sunday is important. Why was Christ the King Sunday created originally and why might it still be important to understand its origins today?
2. What does it mean that there is a nationalistic conflation of the church and the state?
3. How do we separate our pride and love of country from our love and devotion of God? How do we remember we worship God and God alone?
4. Do national flags belong in churches? Why or why not?
5. Listen to this summary about a piece of writing by Laurence Hull Stookey:
   Christ the King Sunday is also known as Reign of Christ Sunday. Both titles take imagery for God drawn from human forms of government…and such language implies that God is subject to the whims of an electorate, or that God is fallible like a monarch or a president. But God is God: divine, just, and sovereign. If we stand opposed to the justice of God, it is we who will either bend to the divine will or be judged and set aside by its holiness. Divine justice ultimately has its way, no matter how long that may

seem to take or how great our difficulty in believing that it will occur. No metaphor drawn from human systems of government is therefore adequate for God.

What does this make you think about? Why do we use these 'human' metaphors and descriptions and what benefits might the conservation about labels for God offer to us?

Closing Prayer

We name you King, O God, and we pray daily for your coming Kingdom. But even in that naming, we grow weary in the waiting for that day to come. We grow weary of the brutal powers of our day. We wonder when you will move among us with mercy and compassion. And then we notice. We notice when we join communities of people who also pray for justice. We notice when others join with us on the path toward love. And we rejoice that when we stand together, with you in our midst, we get a glimpse of your kingdom. Give us patience, and faith, and joy in this hard journey toward your Kingdom. Help us always to remember that you are indeed king of all creation, and your Word will indeed bring the final victory. We pray all of this in the name of Christ, our King, and our Savior. Amen.

"My God, I love Thee. Solely because Thou art my God and my Eternal King."