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In the name of our one God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Today is Christ the King Sunday. I became aware that I would be preaching on Christ the King Sunday while I was attending a conference in Asheville a few weeks ago. I thought I might have some down time so I looked up the texts for the next time I would be preaching. The first thing I noticed was not the assigned text but the identification of this day with the title, "Christ the King." This title, as I have come to discover and will explore further with you this morning, is not at all in reference to the title King of the Jews that the Romans bestowed in mockery upon Jesus.

The title, Christ the King, caught my attention so abruptly because the theme of the conference I was attending was Spiritual Revolution. The two speakers, John Dominic Crossan and Diana Butler Bass, were developing a theological understanding of Jesus, who is Christ, as a revolutionary. The Jesus they described countered everything that people associate with a conventional king. Jesus was the radical Hebrew who dared to take on the Roman Empire; to nonviolently encounter the violent rulers of his day. This was not the behavior of a king in those times. It was not the behavior of any king the world had ever known. My immediate thought upon considering Christ the King Sunday was that yes, Christ is King but to the world in which he lived, and indeed the world in which we live He is the "un" King, as in the "un" cola.

In 1969 a soda called 7UP was called the "un"cola. It was so called because it was fizzy and sweet like CocaCola but it was clear. It's flavor came from lemons and limes and not the coca bean. So it was cola but it was different; it shared some of the features but not others. Christ shares some of the features of kingship with worldly kings but not many. For example, his Father was and is a ruler. God is sovereign over

the entire cosmos. He comes from royal stock, so to speak. And He cares for His subjects, even more than worldly kings but they do care, too. They care not to have rebellion. Jesus cares because he cannot do otherwise.

But there are many ways that Christ is unlike a worldly king. For instance, Christ does not use power arbitrarily nor according to the whims of human ego. He does not exercise judgment according to political will nor the latest polls. A worldly king makes decisions according to territorial boundaries and the pressures of political parties. With Christ, those boundaries aren't there. They simply are not part of the equation. Christ's love and judgment transcends boundaries.

So I wondered, how did Christ the King Sunday come about? And why do we honor it on each year? My curiosity led me to do a little research. It turns out that the feast day of Christ the King was only declared relatively recently. It was initiated in 1925 by Pope Pious XI for the Roman Catholic Church. Pope Pious was inspired to declare the feast day because he observed a growing popular trend toward secularity. People were no longer giving the papacy as much weight in making moral decisions as they once did. People were yielding to the whims of society; succumbing to the lures of wealth, greed and power much more easily. He was concerned that the Italian government was challenging papal civil authority over papal states. In other words, the Italian government was insisting that it was in charge of enforcing the law in Roman papal territory while the Pope was also claiming civil authority. The Pope was taking his lead from scripture. After all scripture informs us in Matthew 28 that God bestowed upon Christ the nations of the world. Christ does have a *special* possession and dominion over all creation. In the Gospel of Matthew Chapter 28, the risen Christ says, "All au-

thority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." (Matthew 28:18) Pope Pious had been deemed to be Christ's representative on earth by the Roman Church. In his mind, in the mind of those loyal to the papacy, Christ maintained greater authority over humanity than did the state.

Thus was the Feast of Christ the King established. The Protestants, including the Episcopal Church, observe it on the last Sunday of the Ecclesiastical Year. This is the last Sunday of the first year of our three ecclesiastical year cycle: Year A features the Gospel Matthew, Year B the Gospel of Mark and Year C the Gospel of Luke. The Gospel of John gets interspersed through all three years, especially in the holiest seasons of Advent and Lent. Next Sunday is the first Sunday of Advent, the first of four Sundays when we prepare to acknowledge the birth of Jesus. Acknowledging His kingship now lends a depth of seriousness to our discipline of preparation.

That said, the kingship of Christ seems to have taken a backseat in our world today. When we look around us, we can see for a fact that Christ is not in charge in the houses of earthly governments; certainly not in our own American government. We look around and ask, almost beg to know, how and where is Christ in power today? Is there another realm of existence somewhere? I think there **must** be. In fact, I believe Jesus told us about that other realm while he was dwelling among us. Our faith tells us that Jesus was given to all humanity in order to point the way to that other realm of existence. Jesus called that other realm "the kingdom of God."

During his earthly ministry Jesus told us that he was in this world but not *of* this world. One of the images of Jesus given to us in scripture is as a shepherd. As a shepherd, Jesus came to lead us to this other realm of existence where there is anoth-

er way of being human; a different way to *be* that leads to a full, authentic experience of human life. The way of Jesus leads to a realm of existence that we can discover right in the midst of the chaotic and dangerous world that we see.

Some people discover that they can remain in the realm of God's kingdom more often than not. They are the people that we call monastics; the people like Mother Theresa who let go of any attachment to worldly pursuits or pleasures for a life of complete service to the least of these. But most of us wander in and out of that realm that Jesus pointed us to - serving those in need when we are given the opportunity but relishing in the moments when we can experience the joys of this world with all of our senses. We take great delight in delicious and savory food, we relish the sounds of great music, we take in the glorious landscapes that abound on our planet home. But still, we are aware when we see, feel and know of great suffering. It is in those moments that we enter the realm of God's kingdom.

It is in that realm that Christ *is still* King. When we are awakened the nearness of that realm it takes an intentional effort to prepare. We are called to take up Christ's offer to follow him and then deliberately make the turn away from worldly pleasures to follow Him. We are invited to turn away from all the alluring invitations from the beguiling world that leads ultimately to worries and stress, to the potential for violence and danger.

As Jesus modeled for us, we can resist the temptation to abuse power but we first need to acknowledge what power and privilege we have. What Jesus is calling us to is radically different from the world that we know. This place, this church, serves as an entry point to that realm that Jesus inhabited and described. In this place we can be

that community that lives into the vision God has for us; the vision that the gospels so powerfully describe. Through prayer and confession and Eucharist together we become Christ's body for the world. Together following Christ we can resist the temptation to serve ourselves first, and thereby neglect the least of these. Christ the shepherd king continues to guide us into the generous spirit of service and giving. May God grant us the will to turn and follow.