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Christ the King Sunday
“The Shepherd King”
A sermon by Sam Miglarese

November 26, 2017

Ezekiel 34: 11-17; Psalm 23; 1Thessalonians 5: 1-11; Matthew 25: 31-46

Happy Thanksgiving to one and all.

Thanks to our youth last week for their “do something” sermons. Their preaching, their singing, their words and their energy really did inspire us all. I would also like to echo Mindy’s words of gratitude for the sermonic three (Graham, Sam and Sigfried) from last Sunday’s celebration with our youth. What they captured for us in their message about “doing something in faith” goes to the heart of the gospel of Matthew. We are the salt of the earth and light to the world. I think they conveyed that to us, and you can hear it over and over again in Matthew’s gospel in many different ways.

But Garfield needs to follow the challenge of the sermonic three. We are what we do, not what we say we are. I picked up the cartoon section the next day from Garfield, and Garfield said the exact opposite of what our preachers prayed. Garfield is asked to offer some suggestions on “doing something” and in typical Garfield fashion he responds with, “Let’s **not** do something.”

We end the church year and the cycle of readings from Matthew by celebrating this festival of Christ the King. Throughout the course of this last Sunday of the church year, we try to capture all that went before it, to sum up under the title of Christ as King the meaning of it all for those of us who claim to follow Jesus as his disciples. For Americans in particular this is problematic since our historical memory tends to associate kings with tyranny. Kings and kingdoms have no cash value in our culture.

From the Declaration of Independence: “The history of the present King of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over these states.” George Washington set the precedent—he wanted to be called “Mr. President” and he stepped down from office after his elected term—something unthinkable for a king. It is deeply ingrained in our culture to reject the notion that we serve under a king: Freedom and liberty are what we have been willing to fight and even die for—from the beginning of our nation’s history, right up to today. So it is hard for the American psyche to get in touch with the significance of kings and kingdoms.

Yet on this feast day, this celebration of Christ the King, we have an opportunity to explore the way in which Jesus turned that language upside down and made us realize that it is completely different than any worldly way of understanding kings and government. What do we do with this feast? Look how different is the kingdom proclaimed by Jesus and how far he was from our notions of a worldly king! What Jesus proclaimed was not a kingdom like anything we have ever known in this world. Jesus spoke about the “reign of God” – a world where God is in charge, and where every person lived by and benefited from God’s rules and laws. He called for and pointed to a new era - one where the Beatitudes, not the commandments of old – would be the law of the land: “Blessed are the poor, happy are those who do to others as you would have them do to you, where love and forgiveness not strict justice and retribution are the norm.” The Kingdom was a central symbol that defined his personality and mission—it was the cry on his lips, a deep feeling in his heart and thoughts on his mind—he lived it and died for God’s Kingdom’s presence among us.

Now, you know as well as I that God’s reign –the kingdom proclaimed - is not yet fully here. I do not have to list the miseries, brokenness, tragedies, violence and sicknesses of our nation and world. It is discouraging, and you wonder if the kingdom is able to be fully present to us. But we do have little glimpses and powerful experiences of God’s reign whenever we live out in whatever way we can the beatitudes, whenever we respond with generosity to those least in our lives and those struggling in our community to survive. That is where the kingdom shows its power and its strength to each and every one of us.

One example I would like to give is a word of commendation to our Service and Mission Committee. You know our Service and Mission Committee is entrusted

by Mindy and the Session with directing your pledge dollars to those who are in NEED. And I am certain you recognize how complicated that task is in the 21st century. The demands made upon your pledge dollars are challenging because of our limited resources. What I've learned is, they've used the foundational clarity of the principles of the gospel as the basis for their decision making. They saw need, and that is what this text from Matthew is all about, need to give food to the hungry, drink to the thirsty, homes to refugees and people of the street, clothes for those in this winter time to keep warm, a healing presence to those who are sick, practical friendship and encouragement to those in prison. I commend them, I thank them. The Service and Mission Committee has our ongoing love and support for the many ways that that they, and many of you, serve those in need and make a difference.

We must be the salt and light to a broken world. We are what we do, not what we say we are. Every time that happens, we make real the reign of God and acknowledge Jesus as our King. We are so familiar with the words of Jesus that we easily forget how radical his kingdom truly is. Just try to live it in today's world, you quickly discover how challenging it is. Hard and complicated, yes, but the beauty of the Gospel is that it gives us clear foundational principles of how to live as part of God's reign with Jesus Christ as our King.

None of us should listen to this familiar parable with complacency. We celebrate the feast of Jesus Christ as a king who sought to turn the world upside down: who embraced poverty and not power; for whom riches were measured by the widow's mite, not the billionaire's net worth; who found joy in forgiveness not retribution. Today's feast poses for each of us and all of us—rather relentlessly—the question under whose banner we really stand in the choices we make, both in our personal lives and in the broader social choices reflected in our nation's political and economic priorities.

I invite you to pray together in the Lord Supper's Great Thanksgiving prayer that we may be renewed in our conviction, that this message of a Shepherd King is true so they we can we can proclaim it with confidence and live out this good news with courage.

A word of thanks to all who perform in this community simple and direct acts of mercy and generosity to those most in need here and everywhere as we advocate for structural change.

Please hear again the words of the true shepherd, our God, who rejected the selfishness of the false shepherds and says “I myself will be the Shepherd of my sheep. I am in charge and I will make them lie down, I will seek the lost, I will bring back the stray, I will bind up the injured and I will strengthen the weak.”

Let us pledge our allegiance to this Shepherd King and his son, Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen

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