

CEC Christ the King; November 21, 2010

This Sunday is known as the Feast of Christ the King, and it stands at the end of the long season after Pentecost as a summing up of what we've learned about Jesus Christ, and as an introduction to Advent.

So much comes together here, that if this feast didn't exist, it would almost be necessary to invent it.

Which is exactly what happened in 1925, when the Roman Catholic Church decided that there ought to be a feast that specially underlined the all-embracing authority of Christ. We Episcopalians have adopted it as well, sensing its fitness for this beginning and end of seasons. For Christ Church Red Wing it is also, of course, our parish name day, a more than usually festive celebration, and—at 10:00 am—a baptism.

When you "image" Christ - when you think of Jesus – what image or metaphor do you come up with for him?

Is it Christ the King, or something else?

For many today the Biblical metaphor of Christ the King is somewhat out of fashion; they hear it as patriarchal and hierarchic, a remnant of of an old, oppressive era.

Historically, most kings are men of immense power who are unafraid to issue orders and compel obedience, men unafraid to ask others, no - to command others, to die for their causes, makers of law and enforcers of their own wills and the will of the State they command. Even benevolent Kings expect their subjects to obey, to be loyal to them and serve them.

This is Jesus?

I think that most of us, when we think of Jesus, picture him as something entirely other than as our King:

more likely is Jesus as a shepherd

Jesus as a teacher,

Jesus as a healer,

Jesus sitting with the children gathered around him.

So when we do declare Jesus is King – when we declare with Peter that he is the Messiah,

the anointed one of God – often we have a hard time wrapping our mind around what it is we truly are confessing.

How do we make sense of this metaphor in our fiercely independent age?

This sermon was written by The Rev. Theo Park and delivered at Christ Episcopal Church, Red Wing. Fr. Theo thanks all those whose material he has borrowed and apologizes to those he has overlooked.

We do not like the idea of obedience.

We do not like the idea that someone can "command us" to do something, that someone has authority over us.

I suspect that the real issue behind objections to the image of Jesus as King is this: Do I want someone other than myself to be Lord of my life?

When we image Jesus as our friend, as our shepherd, as our brother, as one who comes to us a healer and a teacher, we accentuate in our minds the love and the grace and the goodness that he had and still has; it makes Jesus - "user friendly," it makes Jesus - first among equals.

And so Jesus is.

But we sometimes grow too comfortable with our images of Christ. We sometimes resist too much the full consequences of calling him, as we do at Christmas – while thinking of a him as a baby, mind you – King of Kings and Lord of Lords

We sometimes resist too much the implications of naming him, as does the Book of Revelation:

The Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end
the ruler of the Kings of the earth
the one who is, and who was, and who is to come....

And while we can all agree that Jesus redefined what Kingship means, while we can agree that his kingship is not in fact from this world or like that of the kingships of this world there is still in fact some measure of power that we should ascribe to Jesus – a power over our lives.

A power not of coercion but of respect, and love, a respect and love that has as its fruit willing obedience to God in all areas of lives. As I will ask the parents and sponsors of the baptized, who will answer on Brodie's behalf, and really on behalf of all of us gathered, "Do you turn to Jesus Christ and promise to follow and obey him as your Lord?"

And then, in trying to live that out, with God's help, do we ask ourselves before speaking to someone who has ticked us off, or talking to someone about what is happening in the house next door, or between us and our boss, "What would Jesus say and do here?" "What would Jesus want us to say or do here?" That is the real issue at the heart of the Jesus is King language used by the Church. That is at the heart of the Kingdom of God language used by Jesus.

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Sometimes being faithful is a difficult thing.
Sometimes loving someone or being dedicated to them
means doing things we do not want to do, a kind of tough love approach,
but when we trust in God and believe that God will be faithful to us
when we try to do what is right –
then, as Jesus says over and over again in the gospels,
the Kingdom of God is not far from us – indeed it is at hand – it is over us – and in us.....

Blessed be the name of Jesus – he who is our friend, our brother,
our shepherd, our Lord, and our King, now and evermore. Amen

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