

The Reverend Marjo Anderson

**C: Christ the King /Reign of Christ Sunday
Thematic**

**20 November 2022
Salem, Bridgeport**

“Living for the King and the Kingdom”

Today on this last Sunday of the church year we celebrate Christ the King Sunday or Reign of Christ Sunday.

While many of our festivals go back to the early Church or to the time of the Reformation, this festival began less than 100 years ago – in 1925.

It was instituted by Pope Pius XI

to remind Christians that their allegiance must always be to their spiritual ruler in heaven as opposed to earthly supremacy, which was claimed by Mussolini.

Not only would Christ rule over all at the end of time, Christ must reign now.

As Jesus prayed, *“Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven”*.

Or as Luther put it in his explanation to the 2nd article of the Apostles’ Creed,

*“I believe that Jesus Christ ... is my Lord
and has redeemed me ... from death and the power of the devil ...
in order that I might be His own, live under Him in His kingdom,
and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness,
even as He is risen from the dead, and lives and reigns to all eternity.”*

Lutherans adopted the feast day of ‘Christ the King

as part of the liturgical renewal movement following Vatican II,

at a time when unrest during and following the war in Vietnam

had made it clear that government leaders, even in a democracy, are fallible.

And even though we face the same threat of Christian nationalism and fascism today, for citizens of this country who have never had a king or queen, the concept of what this Sunday means is difficult to grasp.

What on earth does it mean to celebrate Christ the King?

What does it mean to be a subject of the King?

According to Merriam-Webster’s dictionary, a subject is one who:

- lives in the territory of a monarch,
- enjoys the protection of the monarch,
- and owes allegiance to the monarch,
- and is therefore under the authority and control of the monarch, and is governed by the monarch’s law.

If we are subjects of a ruler, then we must subject ourselves to that ruler.

We must submit our wills to the will of the one who rules over us.

That concept, however, goes totally against

what those with power and privilege in our society – which includes most if not all of us – have been taught.

We are taught from a young age that we are NOT to subject ourselves to others, and we are certainly NOT to be submissive.

On the contrary, we are taught in this society

to be self-sufficient, independent, assertive, and to stand up for our rights.

We are taught to value our individual rights over giving up our rights for the common good.

We are taught to put ourselves and our families and our schools and our neighborhoods first, and allow others to fight for themselves.

We have little training in how to be the subject of a king, or how to submit to another.
So, what does it mean to submit to Christ as our King?

Let's take that dictionary definition and look at it a bit more closely.
One thing that the definition says

is that *"a subject is one who lives in the territory of the monarch"*.

Now to understand where we live in relationship to the territory of Christ the King,
we must realize that in this life we live in the middle of a spiritual war zone.

As St. Paul writes in the 6th chapter of his letter to the Ephesians,

*"...our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities,
against the cosmic powers of this present darkness,
against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.*

Therefore, take up the whole armor of God,

so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm."

That's the scriptural witness to the fact that we live in a land
where spiritual forces of evil war against the spiritual forces of God.

If you doubt that there are such things as evil powers,

just ask yourself why every generation – back to Christ and before –
has thought they were living in the end times.

Or just ask yourself why wars never cease.

Or just think about the issues that face us today –

like stopping racial injustice or climate change or food scarcity or pandemics.

If we were smart enough and good enough to solve these problems on her own, we would have. But obviously
we are neither smart enough not good enough to solve them on our own.

Because at each and every moment of our lives we have a choice –

are we going to live in the kingdom of this world or in the kingdom of God,
both of which exist simultaneously in our war zone here on earth.

If we want to live in the kingdom of God, then we need to be following Christ the King's commands.

A second part of the definition of being a subject of a monarch

is that *"a subject owes allegiance to the monarch,
and is therefore under the authority/and control of the monarch,
and is governed by the monarch's law"*.

That means that if we want to fight on Christ's side and live in his kingdom,

we must be under Christ's authority and control, and submit to Christ's commands.

That's not as easy as it sounds, however,

because it's not always easy to tell which army is which
because this war is not between foes wearing different uniforms
or speaking different languages.

It's more like living in the middle of a mystery story

in which everyone seems to be a suspect
and it's really hard to tell if someone is working with you or against you.

The enemy is subtle and subversive and great at deceiving us.

So the question is: how do we make sure we are following Jesus?

Well, first of all, following Jesus is not the same as having good intentions.

Peter had good intentions when he tried to keep Jesus from going to Jerusalem
and when he cut off the soldier's ear.

Saul had good intentions when he tried to stop those Christians

who were blaspheming according to the Jewish law he had been taught.

Following Jesus is not the same as having good intentions

And, following Jesus is not the same as doing what seems practical or logical.
It wasn't logical for God to choose
the 75-year-old childless Abraham and the 65-year-old childless Sarah
to be the parents of many nations.
It wasn't logical for God to ask Abraham to sacrifice that child.
It wasn't logical for God to choose Jacob who was a trickster, scoundrel and scam artist.
It wasn't logical for God to choose David, Jesse's young son who was only a shepherd boy
to be king.
It wasn't logical for God to choose Moses who was wanted for murder in Egypt
and who stuttered to go and convince Pharaoh to set the Hebrew slaves free.
It wasn't logical for God to choose a young insignificant girl named Mary
to give birth to the Messiah.
It wasn't logical for Jesus to die on the cross.
It wasn't logical that Jesus chose 12 ordinary, uneducated disciples to change the world.
No, if there are two choices before you, a logical one and an illogical one,
and you're not sure which God wants you to choose, I'd bet on the illogical one.
Following Jesus is not the same as doing what seems practical or logical.

So how do we follow Jesus?
By getting to know him.
Not by getting to know more about him,
but by getting to know him in an intimate and ever deepening way.
Because only by getting to know him more deeply
will we be able to recognize his voice
or recognize him when we see him in disguise
or recognize him when we feel his presence.
And as we get to know him, something amazing will happen.

Something will change at the core of our being
and we will be transformed into something new.
It's what happened to Saul on the road to Damascus
that transformed him from one of the greatest persecutor of Christ
to his greatest ambassador.
It's what happened to the disciples on the day of Pentecost,
that transformed them from ordinary and sometimes not-too-bright people
into such passionate preachers and proclaimers of the good news of Christ
that they changed the entire world.
It's what happened to Martin Luther
that turned him from an ordinary and even depressed monk
into the man who began the Protestant Reformation.
It's what happened to me that changed me from an introverted person
who had no interest outside my own denomination or White bubble
into being someone whose passion for building bridges
across denominations and race has led me so far out of my old comfort zone
that there's no question that it's God's work.

Following Jesus also entails risks, because when you fight for Christ,
you can expect resistance to arise from the enemy.
Abraham and Sarah were in danger numerous times; Isaac was almost sacrificed.
Jacob wrestled an angel all night long
and limped the rest of his life from that encounter
David fought many physical battles.
The prophets were constantly in trouble with those against whom they prophesied.
Jesus died on the cross.
Paul was beaten, stoned, shipwrecked, imprisoned, and eventually killed.
The apostles also suffered and all but one was killed.
Luther was excommunicated from the church and made an outlaw by the state,
and had to hide out for over a year.
But here's the thing,
Living as a subject under Christ the King means that you enjoy his protection.
As long as Christ has work for you to do, he will rescue from the power of the enemy.
He saved Abraham and Sarah until the promise was fulfilled.
He saved Isaac. He saved Jacob
He saved David numerous times. He saved the prophets many times.
He saved Paul and the apostles from all of the beatings and all of the stonings
and all of the ship wrecks and all of the imprisonments.
And as long as he has work for us to do and as long as we are doing that work, he will save us.
And even when our work here on earth is done and we die, we will be raised with Christ to new life.

This is what I know:

When God has transformed your heart by the work of the Holy Spirit
then you really can't do anything except follow Jesus.
You'll know exactly what he wants you to do,
not because it's logical or practical or comfortable or safe, but because he'll let you know.
And once you know what Christ wants you to do, you'll do it, no matter what the risk,
because your trust is not in any other person but in Christ and Christ alone.

And when Christ does step in and save you, then it makes everything worth it.
Because then you know even more than you did before
that he loves you and wants the best for you and is with you
and will always look out for you and will protect you and save you.
And you'll also know that you played your part in winning the battle.
The war will continue probably long after you and I have passed on,
but you will know that you are playing your part in fighting for your king and his kingdom.

On this Christ the King Sunday, then, this is my prayer.
May the Spirit transform our hearts and minds
that we might come to know Christ as our King,
the one who protects us, the one to whom we owe our allegiance,
the one who fights for us and with us and through us
so that his kingdom may come on earth as in heaven – right here and right now.
To Christ our King be all honor and glory and power! Amen!