

## Christus Rex

A sermon by the Reverend Robert Bruce Edson in Saint John's Episcopal Church, Franklin, Massachusetts on the Feast of Christ the King, Sunday, November 22, 2009.

*Pilate asked him, "So, are you a king?"*

John 18: 37

Today we celebrate feast of Christ the King, acknowledging the sovereignty of God in Christ over all other gods and all earthly rulers. It is God's might, majesty, dominion and power in Christ over all things. Living in a republic as we do, we may not easily relate to the concept of the kingly nature of Christ, but if you read history and literature you know that kings and queens predominate in times past.

I never underestimate the insight of children to perceive things of a spiritual nature. Some years ago, at a coffee hour after church, a little girl about four years old greeted me with, "Hi, God." Now, I had been called many things, but never had I been called God. I could only assume that her parents told her that they were going to God's house to pray and she assumed I must be the one they were talking about. I explained to her that I wasn't God but that I teach and lead worship about God and Jesus.

At a children's Good Friday service, I planned to tell them about sin and forgiveness. I began by asking if anyone knew what sin is. One very bright little girl raised her hand and said, "It is when you do something wrong and you know it." In her innocent wisdom she was right on the mark. I then asked the children to put down on a piece of paper if they had been hurt by anyone or if they had hurt another. I then had them place what they wrote at the foot of a large wooden cross in front of the altar to emphasize that because Jesus gave himself up for us on the cross and forgave those who put him there, we must forgive others. As they went forward with their notes, their parents joined them in placing their concerns at the cross.

We all begin life in a Garden of Eden state of grace and innocence. It wasn't until we went against what we knew to be right that we then left that state of innocence to enter the world of sin. Original sin does not mean that we were born sinful; it means that from our human origins we inherit the ability to be sinners. We have to know the difference between right and wrong before we can be held responsible for our actions. That is where redemption comes in. Just as when we return bottles and cans to a redemption center to receive the value of our deposit, the church is a redemption center that teaches us to acknowledge our sin and wrongdoing and regain our value and worth.

Christ as King of kings brings forgiveness and reconciliation to the world. Where do we find this kingly Christ? He is found in the stranger whom we welcome into our midst. He is in the face in those on the street and in the shelters that we feed and give our winter coats. It is he whom we encounter in hospitals, nursing homes and mental wards who need and deserve adequate health care. When we visit the least of our brothers and sisters, we minister to Christ and when we don't, it is he whom we neglect. The time comes when we must decide if we are going to be part of the solution by doing something about conditions in which people live. If we allow people to go without adequate clothing, food, shelter and health care, we remain part of the problem. While the cynical and self-righteous perpetuate the status quo, the compassionate seek to be part of the solution. These lines express how it feels to be between those who don't care and those who act to change conditions:

*I was hungry and you formed a humanities club to discuss my hunger.  
 I was imprisoned and you went off to pray for my release.  
 I was ill clothed and you criticized my poor taste in clothes.  
 I was sick and you thanked God for your own good health.  
 I was homeless and alone and you left me alone to pray for me.  
 You seem so holy, so close to God, but I'm still hungry and lonely and cold.*

It is the mark of a Christian to be understanding and compassionate toward who are in need. Jesus as an outcast in his own time reached out to the outcasts and included them in. Can we do anything less? He identified with the least, the lost and the last. He befriended sinners, tax collectors and prostitutes and in the end was put to death between two thieves. He refused to give the rich, the powerful and the self-righteous any special status. Christ the King, Son of the living God and descendent of King David was unimpressed with social position, ancestry, wealth, authority or privilege. As a result he was regarded as a radical, a traitor and a breaker of cherished traditions. He broke tradition by embracing the leper and relating to women on an equal basis with men. He teaches us to love the unlovable and assures us that God loves us when we are at our most unlovable. He is our example of forgiving as we have been forgiven.

We all have people in our lives that make life difficult for us. When encountering difficult people, I try to see the inner person that God sees and encourage their better side. If God can see the good in me, I can only try to do the same for others. If you want an exercise in humility, try writing your own obituary. It is agonizing but therapeutic experience. After several humbling attempts, I felt less judgmental about the difficult people I've known.

Our mission is to make visible the authentic presence of Christ in the world. How we respond to people in need is a good test of our commitment to that mission. If we really want to do something for the least and lost of our brothers and sisters, we can't expect them to pull themselves up by their bootstraps if they don't have any bootstraps. The most helpful thing to do is to give them the means by which they can help themselves and regain their dignity.

Christ the King exalted himself in humility as he reached out to the "wretched refuse" of humanity. If Christ's kingly reign is make a difference, it must begin with us to make it happen.

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