

Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14  
Psalm 93  
Revelation 1:4b-8  
John 18:33-37

Christ the King B  
St Barnabas, Bainbridge Island  
November 25, 2018  
The Rev. Karen Haig

### Who Is At The Top Of Your List?

I keep a treasure box in my office. It's filled with cards and pictures and notes, most of them given to me by children. One of my favorite things in that treasure box is a picture note given to me by a 6-year old at my former parish. I know you can't see it from where you are, so I'll describe it for you.

Here is a great cloud – God is standing atop the cloud and the sun is shining down on a sweet little house with a chimney and windows and a flower garden. There is a little girl next to the house. It's the little girl who made the picture. We can tell because it says "me." It also says "angel."

The pictures are sublime, but the words are even better... Right here, up at the top she begins...

I love God

I love mommy

I love daddy

I love my brother

Here – up at the top. The first thing on the list ... I love God. No wonder Jesus said we must become like little children in order to enter the kingdom of Heaven, a kingdom where the God whose name is love is alive and reigns over all. And so today, on this very last Sunday of the Christian Year, we celebrate God at the top of the list, fully alive in our lives, and reigning over all.

Christ the King Sunday is a newish celebration day as the Christian calendar goes. Pope Pius XI decided on it in 1925, because he wanted to counter the horrible dread, the terrible violence, the seeming reign of evil that people experienced in the Great War and its aftermath. He wanted an outward and visible sign for us that the future belongs to goodness, to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and that we belong to him too. He wanted us to remember that dominion belongs to Christ, not to violence, not to war, not to consumerism, to the free market, or even to our families. He wanted to remind us that Christ is King and as the people of his kingdom, we need be subject to nothing, absolutely nothing but Christ. So on this last Sunday of the Christian year, just before we turn toward the advent of the one who came as an innocent babe to rule over all, we are offered the opportunity to reflect on who or what, ultimately, rules our lives. To reflect on who, or what, is at the top of our list.

A provocative Baptist preacher once said that the biggest lie told in America is this: "Jesus is Lord." And he was probably right. Surely we have not surrendered everything in our lives, our public lives, let alone our private lives to the rule of Jesus Christ. So then, what dominion does Christ really have over us? How often do we actively seek out and submit to God's will in the everyday-ness of our lives? Or perhaps a more meaningful question would be "When am I tempted to compartmentalize God?" Or "Why is that I only allow God in to very particular places?" Places like Sunday at church, but not Monday through Friday at work? Maybe we let God reign in our spiritual lives, but leave God behind when it comes to our material lives. Or possibly God is at the

foundation of our moral code, but unrecognizable in our politics or investments or in the ways we use our time. Perhaps in the things we do and the things we don't. To submit our wills to God's will, to offer our lives to God's mission, to have at the very top of our list - "I love God" is to say that Christ is King in our lives. Allowing Christ to be our King isn't about what we know, or even what we know we ought to do. It's about how we live and what we give. It's quite simple really – not easy, but simple. You know it by now, you've heard me say it so often. We have to give everything. That's right. Everything.

Now I imagine that sounds pretty ridiculous in the world we live in, doesn't it? Give everything to Jesus? Become a subject of Christ the King? Really? In this world? In this culture? This is the world where getting ahead matters, where being the best matters, where getting there first & having the most matters. We live in a world where individualism reigns supreme and "self-care" is a multi-billion dollar industry. Giving OVER is the antithesis of what the world demands of us as bright and successful people. But then Jesus never did make much sense to the ones who made the rules. And he didn't always make sense to the rest of the people either. Not then, and not now.

Jesus was not the kind of king the people thought was coming. He was a different kind of king. What kind of king gets himself executed between two common criminals? He was GOD for crying out loud, and he couldn't even save himself from the common and horrific death of common and horrific criminals. That's what the world sees... but if we pay attention, if we really listen, really look at what was happening, we will see that in that act, Jesus sought the complete and total transformation of the world. And the way he sought to transform the world was by loving it. Not by controlling it or powering over it or manipulating it with magic miracles. But by loving it.

In Martin Scorsese's film, *The Last Temptation of Christ*, the conversation between Pilate and Jesus that is today's gospel passage makes clear what Jesus knows about the power of love. Jesus, in a dirty, rough cut ivory robe, sits silently on a bench. His hands are bound, his shoulders slumped, but his eyes - his eyes are keenly focused. Pilate paces back and forth in front of Jesus, interrogating him in a calm, collected, absolutely "*certain of his power*" sort of way. In the course of their not so scriptural, but ever so enlightening conversation, Pilate recounts the stories he's heard of Jesus' miracles, and asks Jesus to make some "magic" for him. "No" says Jesus. "I'm not a trained animal, I'm not a magician." And this is the last straw for Pilate, whose power Jesus simply will not recognize.

In his frustration, Pilate speaks a truth that probably surprises even him. Pilate claims that Jesus has committed the heinous crime of trying to change people's hearts ...

"You know it's one thing to want to change the way people live," Pilate says to Jesus, "but you, YOU want to change the way they think, how they feel."

"All I'm saying" Jesus replies, "is that change will happen with love, not with killing."

“Either way it’s dangerous” says Pilate. “It’s against Rome. It’s against the way the world is. And killing or loving, it’s all the same. It simply doesn’t matter HOW you want to change things, we don’t want them changed.”

That’s the world the baby Jesus was born into and the world the man Jesus lived into. And if we think about it, it’s not so different from our world today. The ones with the power wield that power and dictate the values of the predominant culture. The ones with the power don’t want things changed, after all, that would usurp their power. Power takes the place of authority, and power does not like to be challenged.

Power and authority. The way these two men choose to gain influence is profoundly different. Pilate has power, yes. But Jesus has authority. If you weren’t careful, you might miss the reality that Jesus, sitting there on that bench in his scruffy robe, mostly silent, bound and tied and about to be condemned to death and crucified... if you weren’t careful, you might miss the reality that Jesus holds all the authority. Pilate claims power by overpowering, suppressing and killing. But Jesus claims authority by recognizing who and whose he is; and by recognizing the truth and the value of his very human nature. Jesus lived and died like the common people of his time. He was not a king who remained distant and disconnected from his people, set apart because he was God. He was a man who lived all of the joys and the heartbreaks and challenges that we live. Jesus was a King who knew his followers by name and knew their lives by heart, then and now.

Jesus chose to use his authority to redeem everything in the whole wide world. God did not manipulate him anymore than God manipulates us. Jesus chose to hunker down with the very least of God’s beloved. He chose to suffer everything they suffered, everything we suffer. And in the face of all that suffering, Jesus chose to love with reckless abandon, by loving God more than life itself. Jesus was not the sort of king the people thought God would send them. But he was, and is, the sort of king the people need.

“Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice” Jesus says to Pilate. And as unlikely as it seems in the face of his sure and certain execution, with those words Jesus invites even Pontius Pilate to come along and walk the way of the true King, the Good Shepherd, the one who knows his sheep and calls each of them to him by name.

I love God.  
I love mommy.  
I love daddy.  
I love my brother.

How might our lives be different if always and everywhere, the God whose name is love ruled in our hearts and came to the top of our lists? Amen.