

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 21, 2021
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Dominion

Today is Christ the King Sunday, the very last Sunday of the church year. Christ the King is an interesting concept, and while I understand why we would want to be able to say that Christ reigns in our lives, or that Christ is king in our lives and in the life of the world, probably neither one of those statements is very accurate. That we would want those things, or even strive for those things, yes. We pray each Sunday and likely lots of other times too, “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” We want God to be King, want God’s kingdom to come on earth and in our lives, and we also want our way with things. But I’m getting ahead of myself.

Christ the King Sunday was the invention of Pope Pius XI, who created this celebration in 1925, because he wanted to counter the notion that the earthly rulers who fought it out and even “won” the Great War, were in charge. Pius wanted to counter the dread, the violence and the reign of evil people had experienced in the Great War and its aftermath. He wanted people to have an outward and visible sign that the future belonged to goodness, to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, to the kingdom of God, not the kingdom of European Allies or the US of A.

He wanted us to remember that dominion belongs to Christ, not to violence, not to war, not to racism, not to consumerism, or the free market, or partisan politics or a virus that has killed over 765,000 people. We are not in the aftermath of the Great War but there is unspeakable suffering in our world. And then, as now, proclaiming Christ as King and ourselves as the people of his kingdom and the sheep of his pasture, leaves us subject to nothing, absolutely nothing but Christ.

Do you know that there are gigantic Christ statues all over the world? They’re not so much pilgrimage sites, as they are excellent tourist draws. The tallest Christ the King statue is in a little town in Poland and was conceived of by a retired Polish priest. Built in 2010, and paid for by the 21,000 people who live in the town of Świebodzin¹, this statue of Jesus stands atop a knoll, arms outstretched over the city, rising 167 feet above the ground. Jesus appears to be made of concrete. But his crown, which is nearly 10 feet tall, is shining, sparkling gold. He definitely looks like a KING. I can’t help thinking Jesus would have preferred that \$1.5 million dollars to be spent

¹ <https://www.fodors.com/news/photos/christ-almighty-10-incredible-statues-of-jesus-around-the-world>

feeding hungry people, housing unhoused people, changing our prison systems or providing mental health care to people in need of it.

Świebodzin is understandably proud of its beautiful statue. But in 2018 the world learned that Jesus wasn't just standing there blessing the city. Headlines blared with the news that wifi antennas had been installed in Jesus' crown. Authorities began asking questions, but nobody confessed to using Christ the King's divine powers to enhance their connection capacities.

Countries all over the world vie for the biggest and best Jesus statues, but I'm pretty sure that is the last thing Jesus would want. In his kingdom, the least and the lowest and the littlest are lifted up, and the gigantic and important brought low. But it is the incredible irony of wifi antennas in the crown of the biggest Christ the King statue in the world that really gets to me. After all, if you've spent \$1.5 million dollars to build the biggest Christ the King statue in the world, one would think that was because you wanted people to know that Christ was King, reigning over the town and the lives of the people in that town. What does it say when Jesus has wifi antennas on his head? I'll just let you sit with that a minute.

What does it mean to say that Christ is King? It's an important question, and a question Pilate was grappling with as he interrogated Jesus. Did you notice all the questions that were asked and left unanswered? Did you notice all the answers that seemed to have little to do with the questions that were asked? Listen.

Pilate: "Are you the King of the Jews?" Simple question, right?

Jesus: "Is it really you asking, or is this something other people want to know?" Not exactly an answer to the question.

Pilate: "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own people and religious authorities handed you over to me. What did you do to make them want to do that?" In other words, how worried do I need to be about this?

Jesus: "My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would behave the way you and your people behave. My kingdom is utterly unrecognizable to someone like you." Pilate is not getting the information he wants.

Pilate: "So you are a king?" Just trying to get a little clarity here.

Jesus: "You say that I am a king." Not going to give you the clarity you want. You are speaking in a different language from a different mindset and heartset. Nothing I say will make sense to you.

Sometimes Pilate is portrayed as a man who was somewhat sympathetic to Jesus – trying to get Jesus to submit to him so Pilate could let Jesus go. But know this... the only thing that mattered was Jesus submitting to Pilate. Pilate was a terror, a man who crucified anyone and everyone, a man who probably didn't care at all whether Jesus was the Jewish Messiah. The only thing Pilate cared about was Jesus as a potential threat to his power. That's why Pilate needed to know if

Jesus was a king, why he needed to know what Jesus meant when he said “My kingdom is not from this world.”

What do you think that means?

Some say Jesus rules in heaven and empires rule on earth, but I don't think that is what Jesus meant. I think he was making the distinction between the world of empire which is ruled by violence and dominance and overpowering anything that gets in the way, and the Kingdom of God, which is ruled by love, love that is action rather than feeling.

What would it mean to submit to that rule? What if we didn't just say Jesus is King over all, but said instead, Jesus, and his law of love-in-action have complete lordship, over my life? What would it mean to say thy kingdom come, thy will be done... in me?

Submission and lordship are hard words for us because we are accustomed to the independent lives of the privileged people we are. We may talk about Christ being the ruler, the king of our lives, but truly, we'd rather do what we want. It's pretty easy to be lulled into giving our time and talent and money to the things we think advance our lives, whatever that means, rather than actively discerning what God is calling out of us. That can seem to be working, as long as the illusion that we are in control holds. But when life comes apart – when we get a devastating diagnosis, lose a partner or a job or a friendship or when any of the myriad things that can go wrong, go wrong... when our lives come apart, that illusion of control shows itself for what it really is. An illusion. And when that happens, we likely wish we had spent more time listening for the still, small voice of God. When things fall apart, we'd give our kingdom for God to reign in our lives.

How would your life be different if Christ really had dominion over you?

Many of you have heard me say that I want to want what God wants. And I do. But I only WANT to want what God wants. Which is different from wanting what God wants. Do you see? I wish I only wanted what God wants, but it isn't so. I still want control in the places I want control. I still want to say I'm too tired to have to deal with all the trouble in the world. I still want to excuse myself from the discipline of living a life of balance. Even knowing that God wants only goodness for me, I still do not surrender everything in my life to the rule of Christ the King.

So I ask myself what dominion does Christ really have over me, over us?

How often do we actively seek out and submit to God's will in the everyday-ness of our lives?

Or maybe the better question is “Why is it that I only allow God into certain places in my life?” Places like Sunday, or bible study or my personal prayer times... but not at work, not in my casual acquaintances, not in my important family conversations, not with the whole of myself?

Letting Christ reign in our lives, giving over to a God who was crucified between two common criminals, a God who seemed to lose the sparring match with Pilate, a God who refused to repay violence with violence, doesn't make sense in our world. And at the same time, it is the only

thing that makes sense for me. In living and dying the way he did, 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.

“For this I was born,” Jesus said, “and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth.” And that truth is love. That truth is life. That truth is Jesus. “I am the way and the truth and the life,” Jesus says. The truth doesn’t reside in correct politics, being on the right side of the argument or anywhere else that is a position or a place. The truth resides in the person of Jesus, who is love incarnate. We only need to give over, to let love rule our hearts, our minds, our very lives. To become love incarnate is to make Christ our King. Amen