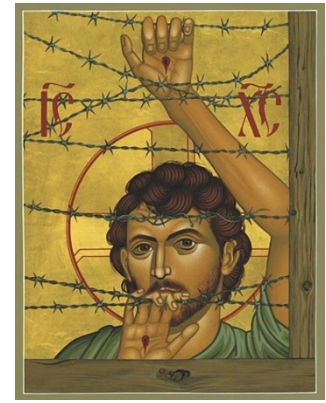


Last Sunday after Pentecost – Christ the King

November 23, 2025

Matthew 25:31-46



Kingship in the Margins

*A sermon preached by The Rev. Dianne Andrews at
St. Barnabas Episcopal Church, Bainbridge Island, WA*

My memory of visiting a county jail is not a happy one. One's sense of dignity is the first thing to be left at the door as one steps into a scanning chamber, hands in the air, while the machine makes its 360-degree whole body inspection. Upon exiting the eerie scanning chamber, a pat down awaits. A gauntlet of steel doors follows, each closure punctuated by an unforgettable echoing metal thud. You know the sound... Then there is the clank of a lock followed by the piercing sound of buzzer announcing progression through the gauntlet. Heavy metal doors slam shut with a harshness that lingers in stark corridors... as do the echoing sounds of one's own footsteps. Jails and prisons are hard places... stripped of any sense of peace, devoid of any corner of comfort. Memories of sunlight and fresh air evaporate in such places. The stark journey into the heart of the county jail strips away layer after layer of any sense of normalcy. Even as a visitor, I felt vulnerable and intimidated. In my own raw experience, I met with my friend... whose day-in and day-out existence was lived in this parched, soul-sucking place. I did not relish the journey away from the outside world, but once I was able to sit across the table from my friend, it was apparent that we were both planted firmly on holy ground. This is the kind of meeting that Jesus talks about in Matthew 25 when he says, "When I was in prison, you visited me." As we contemplate our king, as presented to us today from Luke's gospel, we meet a man hanging on a cross... the same king who entered Jerusalem triumphantly... not on a fine steed but on a humble donkey... absent of the kind of glitzy grandeur so readily displayed by earthly kings and pompous emperors. Today, we meet our king who is calling us to meet him in the margins that lie beyond the zones of familiarity and comfort... margins where walls of separation fall away... places where we can know one another, as we are known, in the light of our true and common humanity... to meet as beloved children of God.

Christ the King Sunday is the last Sunday of our church year. Like most Sundays, we are, today, worshipping into a great paradox. We are worshipping a God who is not of this world... yet at the very same time... we are worshipping a God who is of this world.... Leading us to wrestle with the somewhat puzzling nature of Christ's kingship.

What comes to mind when you think of Christ the King? We might be hearing voices of Handel's great Hallelujah chorus... "King of Kings, and Lord of Lords" with a brass section heralding the king's great triumph. In our mind's eye, we might envision Jesus seated on a golden throne... high in the heavens... surrounded by stars, and angels... holding a royal scepter in one hand and a bejeweled orb in the other... further symbols of kingly authority and sovereignty. The one enthroned in the heavens reigns over all that is. The Christian Church has often morphed the image of a triumphant Christ to fit the scene of lofty palaces gilded with gold... places where... in our dreams and fantasies... we may long to inhabit. It is human to hunger for a place of comfort and ease... a

place free of pandemics and social strife... a place where we can rest from our cares and concerns about the environment, the economy... a place free from the grueling struggle to make ends meet... a place of calm and rest... free from all cares and worries. In our time, gilded palaces may appeal to the imagination, but they are more likely to be tourist attractions than genuine seats of power. Such images may symbolize success, comfort and prosperity. Yet, the king of our faith teaches us that true wealth is not about sitting on stashes of gold, jewels, or bursting bank accounts. In the ancient world, the highest rank that a man could attain was readily understood to be the earthly power held by a king or an emperor. That image of power and success held sway... until Jesus walked the earth and taught us otherwise.

The image I chose for this Sunday's worship is an icon by Robert Lentz, in which Jesus is looking into us through barbed wire that he is pulling apart with his bare hands. The barbs that must be piercing his skin. Bloody nail wounds are evident on his palms. Unflinchingly, Jesus pulls the wire apart to give us a better view. Lentz is telling us that this "Jesus in a tee shirt" is Christ in the form of an immigrant at the border. The one peering into us wants us to see more... his eyes are telling us not to look away. This distance and the relationship between subject and viewer are reversing, and then reversing again. We don't know if we are looking in at Jesus who is the marginalized one... or whether Jesus is looking into us from the outside, into an audience that doesn't even know that it is imprisoned. The barbed wire represents painful separation. Christ's posture and expression call us to another way. The icon is entitled "Christ of Maryknoll," Maryknoll being an order of Roman Catholic missionaries who work among "the poor, the broken, and the oppressed." "Maryknollers are sometimes known as the 'Marines of the Catholic Church' for their reputation of moving into rough areas, living side-by-side with indigenous peoples and learning the language."¹

Brother Lentz writes that he intentionally created the image of "Christ of the Maryknoll" to be vague... vague about which side of the fence Christ is on. Lentz says of the icon:

*"Is [Christ] imprisoned... or are we? Through our cultural institutions and personal lives, we all place barriers between ourselves and true happiness. We, and our institutions, also try to imprison Christ in various ways, to tame him and the dangerous memories he would bring us of our goals and ideals."*²

The icon that Lentz created shows our Christ... as king of the marginalized... the one who calls us to give our whole selves to his service, and to see his face in the least among us. This king is inviting us to know the rawness of human experience, that we may know the richness and splendor of life and service in his name. Courage is required. Courage is not simply fearlessness and daring on a battlefield. Courage comes from the Latin word for "heart." Brené Brown, who speaks widely about the gifts and power of vulnerability, has said that the meaning of courage is to tell the story of who we are with our whole heart. We live in a culture that too often seeks to overcome vulnerability. Brown says that, "We are prone to buy into some mythology about vulnerability being weakness and gullibility and frailty... because it gives us permission not to [go there] and be vulnerable." In her research, Brown identified people she calls "wholehearted," those

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maryknoll_Society

² Br. Robert Lentz, OFM, from his description of "Christ of Maryknoll," Trinity Religious Art <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kmHNRD-LU1U>

who have learned to be comfortable with messiness and imperfection. She talks about creative people and successful leaders who can be authentic by letting go of images of who they “should be”... people who can live with ambiguity... those who have the willingness to ditch the word “perfection” ... and who are consciously willing to fail.

As disciples of Christ, we are invited to serve the one who knows us, warts and all... the one who loves us utterly and completely. We are called to serve as best we can, wholeheartedly, conscious of our fears and trepidation, as we dare to stand with Christ in the margins. Such a posture reminds me of a line from “A Collect for Peace,” found in the office of Morning Prayer in our *Book of Common Prayer*, that reads:

“O God, the author of peace and lover of concord, to know you is eternal life and to serve you is perfect freedom.”³

We are called to serve by giving of ourselves without giving ourselves entirely away. We are invited to serve with the whole of ourselves, knowing that our service will be imperfect and incomplete. We are invited to offer ourselves as a living sacrifice of love... and in that gift of love... we can know true freedom.

The noted preacher Barbara Brown Taylor has described her challenges with this call to seek and serve Christ in all persons asking:

“How do we find the courage to get up in the morning, knowing that every pair of eyes that pleads with us that day... will be his eyes, asking us for something to eat or drink or wear, asking us for recognition, for time, for attention? That is the question, but the Bible is not a book with the answers in the back. All I know is that we are asked to wrestle with that fact, to let it challenge us and unsettle us and – who knows? – maybe even to comfort us. Jesus is so present with us, and we have such unlimited opportunities to meet him and serve him, that in some way we may never understand that everything we do or don’t do affects our eternal relationship with him. ...for sheep and goats alike, the surprise is that Jesus is not somewhere – he is everywhere especially with the least important people who populate our days, whoever they may be.”⁴

I would like to close with a 20th century Franciscan blessing in honor of Christ our King:

May God bless us with discomfort at easy answers, half-truths, and superficial relationships, so that we may live deep within our hearts.

May God bless us with anger at injustice, oppression, and exploitation of people, so that we may work for justice, freedom and peace.

May God bless us with tears to shed for those who suffer from pain, rejection, starvation and war, so that we may reach out our hands to comfort them and turn their pain into joy.

And may God bless us with enough foolishness to believe that we can make a difference in this world, so that we can do what others claim cannot be done.

Amen...

³ *Book of Common Prayer*, page 99.

⁴ Reference MIA.