



**Christ the King Sunday**  
**Cycle A, 2008**  
**The Rev. Dr. Christian Brocato**

+ May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O God, our strength and Redeemer. Amen.

Jesus, reigning as Lord and King: these thoughts, words, concepts are not always comfortable for many of us in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Even from the perspective of inclusivity, Lord and King somehow just don't make it for most of us today, and perhaps they shouldn't. They are narrow terms. They are gender specific. They are far from our worldview of autonomy and democracy and enable us to conjure up all kinds of images, some positive but others, not so positive.

However, our Anglican Tradition presents us with this Sunday, this Christ the King Sunday, at the conclusion of our liturgical year. Yes, we have come full circle as it were, and we anticipate and look forward to a new liturgical year beginning next Sunday, the First Sunday of Advent.

But before we fix our gaze on the new liturgical year, Advent, the Christmas Season, Epiphany and beyond, we have to grapple with two very important things this Sunday, the conclusion of our liturgical year with Christ as King and these very challenging scripture passages. When seen in conjunction with last week's readings, we could be challenged beyond our comfort zones.

Today's Gospel passage is the third and final parable in what is called the great eschatological discourse, a discourse about the 'end time.' It is a kind of summary of true faithfulness, faithfulness to living as Christ would have us live, faithfulness that will be rewarded, when at the end time, Christ will come again, not as a baby in a manger, but in awesome glory with all peoples and nations before him.

"Crown Him With Many Crowns," that beloved hymn that rouses us with a powerful text set to strong driving music, nails the thoughts, words, concepts and images of Christ as King, hailed as the Lamb upon his throne, crowned with royal scepter, regal and triumphant. But, it also clearly tells us that the One who is the "Son of man who every grief hath known...takes and bears them for his own, that all in him may rest." (The Hymnal 1982, #494)

In Middle Eastern traditions, the title of King more often than not refers to that of a Shepherd-King of the people, one who tends and cares for his flock. The King is the "one who does justice to the weak and the poor, whom he protects against the *powerful* and the tyrannical power they exercise toward the defenseless and those threatened by injustice." (*The Days of the Lord*. Vol. 4. Ordinary Time A)

Enter the Prophet Ezekiel whose prophesy in today's first reading is a magnificent lyrical narrative. Ezekiel proclaimed the Lord God as shepherd of the sheep, one who will "seek the lost" and "bring back the strayed," who will "bind up the injured" and "strengthen the weak." (Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24)

This is the same God of Matthew's Gospel who in the person of Christ challenges us to be numbered among those who feed the hungry, give drink to those who thirst, who welcome the stranger, who give of their abundance so that others may have food, clothing and shelter. When Matthew talks about the "least of these," he is referring to those who were considered "the expendables" in Jewish society.

They were the real outcasts, the bottom of the barrel, the lepers, the homeless, the beggars, the widows, and all those left by society to fend for themselves. They were considered "unclean" and therefore were outcasts not only of society but of the Jewish religious establishment as well. (*Partners in Urban Transformation*, 2008)

In this Gospel, Jesus is not just telling us to be *kind* to our neighbors, the unfriendly clerk at Whole Foods, the person sitting next to us in our pew or even the most angry person with whom we work or with whom we might live. Though Jesus does challenge us to be a graced-filled presence for all our sisters and brothers, he also challenges us to be even more attentive to the needs of the *expendables* of our world, the homeless, those imprisoned unjustly in our country and in other countries, and those around the world who suffer great injustices at the hands of others.

My heart goes out to them. I can read accounts of some of those injustices, of those dying in certain regions of the world because governments have abandoned them, of those starving because ill uses of planting crops have depleted the land, of one whose father or mother has died of Aids and who now struggles in one of the poorer countries of the world. But, my heart is oftentimes in one place but my actions might be in another.

Earlier this past week, I recalled my first year of studying for the priesthood. I was assigned to a very poor housing complex in one of the poorest and most dangerous parts of the city where I lived. My ministry was to work with families to discern what the food pantry could provide them for the day and to distribute much needed food to those who had very little. For me to get to my ministry, which was in a building in the middle of the housing project, I had to cross a line of drug dealers. I had never experienced any thing like that before in my life.

I found that week after week, though my heart wanted desperately to do the much-needed work of the social service agency there, I had nightmares. I struggled with not wanting to go, not wanting to have to face that line of very frightening and threatening people, not wanting to get to the agency and then see so many people for whom we could only provide a mere fraction of what they needed. My heart was willing, but there was a disconnect, a disconnect between my inner self and my outer actions.

Even after all these many years, I can read this passage from Matthew and know that I could have done more and that Matthew emphasizes that what we do really does matter, that what we say we believe and what we do about that belief must be connected: hearts and actions, inseparably bound together for the benefit of others. This is what this Gospel passage calls to do. This is what this Gospel passage challenges us to do for the sake of others, for the sake of the Kingdom, for the sake of God and God's reign here and now.

The Parish of the Epiphany celebrates God's reign here and now in its many ministries. In fact if you are a visitor with us today, take note. Epiphany is active, alive and well and is about the business of giving of its abundance so that others may have life. Program after program, ministry after ministry, God's presence is here and extends throughout this congregation and into the world so much in need.

Here at the end of this liturgical year and anticipating a new year in Christ, we pledge ourselves and our treasures, so that even the expendables of society may know the love of God through our stewardship of God's many gifts to us for the sake of others. We put into practice what is in our hearts, so that others may know the deep-seated spirituality that is infused in them and throughout the Parish.

We have seen Christ in the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, and we have given so that they may be freed from hunger and thirst, so that they may know the welcoming hospitality of God. Matthew assures us that when we have done this for the "least of these, who are members of God's family," then, we did it to God, and we have made the great connection between our hearts and our actions.

As we look forward to a new year in Christ and to a wonderful celebration of Thanksgiving this coming Thursday, let us give thanks for the abundance that has been ours this past year. Let us pray that we continue to share that abundance with our sisters and brothers, a manifestation of the Reign of Christ, a manifestation of the Kingdom of God made here and everywhere present. Amen!