

Sermon for November 24, 2019 – “Threshold Moment”

Reign of Christ Sunday, Year C – Texts: Hebrews 1:1-9; Luke 23:33-43

Today, is Christ the King Sunday, the day on which we celebrate the fact that Jesus is our King; that he is the one in control over all things; who holds us and all creation in his hands. Christ the King is also the last Sunday of the liturgical/church year, so it's kind of like New Year's Eve. That particular time in between one year and the next; between a world that we knew and the undiscovered country of what will be.

Similarly, in many ways, Christ the King Sunday stands between two worlds. The world of the past and the world of the future. The world of the past that we are leaving behind began last Advent. We began a journey that took us from the announcement of the coming of Messiah, to the birth of Christ in a Manger, to the visit of the magi at Epiphany.

We kept on moving into Ash Wednesday, along the path of Lent, the path to the cross. We were surprised by an empty tomb on Easter morning and yet again by the coming of the Holy Spirit in tongues of fire at Pentecost. After that we heard the teachings of Jesus again and anew.

Just a few weeks ago we remembered our veterans and before that on All Saints Sunday we remembered loved ones who've died. Alongside all of that, we baptized children, confirmed young adults, commissioned a new staff member, consecrated our pledges and participated in a school project.

The world of the future begins in much the same way that last year began. We will begin the story of Advent with waiting for the Messiah to come. And yet, Christ the King isn't just a flip of the calendar page from one year to the next. Things don't just continue on in the cycles and patterns of life that we're used to. Christ the King is no ordinary year end. Christ the King also carries with it a view of the end of all things, the big ending toward which our world is headed. In many ways, the world has been preparing us to glimpse the grand scale of Christ the King.

This year, as in many recent years, our world feels like it's teetering on the edge of chaos. We've seen terror attacks, mass shootings. We've seen mass migrations of people fleeing war and violence. We've seen whole nations grow in discontent with fear and anxieties rising. We've seen political gaps widen with division and rancor, even politically motivated violence popping up everywhere. We've asked ourselves – how long, O Lord?

And all of a sudden, the part of Christ the King Sunday that harkens to the end of time doesn't seem so far off. What's coming next for us in our little part of the world for everyone, truth be told, feels uncertain and foggy at best – ominous and terrifying at worst. And that's coming from an optimist.

In many ways, it feels like we're standing in a doorway. It feels as if we're leaving a way of being that was comfortable, at the very least, familiar, and about to enter a new space, one that could very well be – might very likely be, as recent history seems to suggest – a stranger, more dangerous one. Christ the King is a doorway of sorts – a threshold. It's a

space between neither fully in one space or the other. And so perhaps oddly or fittingly, we don't hear a gospel passage about either the beginning or the end. Nope, we hear a story that's closer to the middle of Jesus' story. Today, we return to the cross. We turn to a moment when Jesus is named as king, but in the least king-like of circumstances.

It's occurred to me that this is something of an odd moment in Jesus' story, an odd thing to choose to remember on a day we've chosen to celebrate Christ as our King. Yes, technically Jesus is talked about as a King, but only in the most mocking and sarcastic way. And so the moment of the cross is, in the eyes of many, not really a Kingly moment.

Far from it.

And while it's neither the beginning nor the end of the story, it is a doorway moment.

The cross is a doorway moment.

A threshold moment.

A moment between two worlds.

A moment where all creation stands between two worlds.

Everything that leads to the cross – from creation, to God's covenant with the people of Israel, to the birth and ministry of Jesus – all lay in the shadow of the reality of the Garden of Eden. The reality that sin and death had taken hold of humanity and, indeed, of all creation – and that no matter how much God had called us to repent and return, we did not.

And so on that cross – the doorway of the cross, Jesus himself – was all that stood between the power of death and the power of the God of life. And everything that was upside-down about the world; all that humanity believed to be the truth about the world was exposed as the lie it had always been and turned right-side up.

The lie that power comes from the ability to control and to kill.

The lie that darkness could overcome the light.

The lie that death was the end.

The lie that God had abandoned creation, abandoned those whom he'd created.

The cross exposed all those things to us while showing us what was true, what was to come. The truth that true power is found in love and compassion; in the ability to make alive. The truth that the one we were putting to death is the one who would save us all. The truth that the world was about to be flooded with light that would overcome the darkness.

And this is the moment that we stand today.

Christ the King is the same threshold moment of the cross.

Our world feels like is spiraling out of control.

Division and conflict seems to be winning.

Fear, judgement and hate seems to be growing.

Terror, violence and war feel out of control and way too close for comfort.

Is it just me, or does our world feel so much different these days? I don't know about you, but I'm not sure I'm ready for the Advent season that starts next Sunday.

We've had a number of deaths these last few weeks. It's been a difficult time for us and for me personally. And yet, precisely at the moment, when we'd like to pack it all in, when we feel as though we're about to be swallowed up by all the darkness – precisely at this threshold moment of Christ the King, when we're about to step out of one world into the next, this is – and brothers and sisters here's the thing – precisely the moment when God will turn our world right side up. God will turn us around to begin the story of life all over again.

And God will begin quietly in the stories of Advent. In the story of God coming into the world like a single candle being lit in a dark room – a candle of hope which we will light next week – he will remind us again and again and again, that just when the world feels the most lost, the most hopeless, the darkest it can be, that light is being born in the most unexpected places. Light that comes not from Kings or Presidents; not in bold or brash or loud and overwhelming ways; but light born in the middle of the night, to a couple of nobodies in the middle of nowhere.

Christ the King is a doorway to that world – a world where the light is being born. Christ our King is the one who comes to us as the light of our dark world; who comes to us again and again each Advent, each time we think the darkness is about to win.

Today, God is pulling us through the threshold; through the doorway found at the cross. Christ the King Sunday is how we end one year and begin another. But Christ our King is the one in whom our God meets us.

On a cross.

In a stable.

In a dark, cold world.

And today, in Christ our King, God takes us from cross to empty tomb; from stable to lavish feast around the throne; from darkness into light; from death into life.

Thanks be to God. Amen and amen.