

Christ the King Sunday  
The Reverend John H. Brock

November 24/25, 2007  
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church

Jeremiah 23:1-6; Psalm 46;  
Colossians 1:11-20; Luke 23:33-43

Grace and peace to you from God who is, who was, and who is to come. Amen.

This is Christ the King Sunday. Christ the King Sunday ends our church year. Next weekend begins Advent, the precursor to Christmas. But the church year ends with Christ the King. This is a festival that I think many Christians, and I think many Americans in particular, struggle, because we don't "DO" kings. There are those folks who would attempt to compare what a king does to a President (I, myself, am guilty of that), but, the more I think about it, there are far too many differences than there are similarities between what a King does and President.

Presidents are elected. They serve a specific amount of time, then step down. They can be removed from office, in a relatively peaceful manner. And, any rule that a president makes can be overturned by the House and the Senate. A king, on the other hand, ascends to the throne, either through birth or some kind of military action. A king serves for life. Pretty much the only way that a king can be removed is through bloodshed or death, and what the king says is law. Why, really, would we want a king? We had a king, many centuries ago, and got rid of the king that we had.

To help us get a little better grasp of what being a king is all about, we are going to use an Old Testament example. We are going to talk very briefly about 1 Samuel, chapter 8. At that point in history, the people escaped from Egypt (where they served a king); they wandered for a few decades, but eventually settled down in the Promised Land. For awhile they were ruled by judges. These judges were folks who, when there was a problem, who would rise up and help lead the people, and then go back to whatever their line of business was before.

But then, eventually, the people came to Samuel, who was a prophet. They said to Samuel, 'we want to be like everybody else. Everybody else has a king, so we want to have a king too.' Samuel gets a little ticked off by this because the Lord God Almighty is supposed to be their king. So, Samuel goes and he complains to God. God says, Samuel, don't worry about it: "They have not rejected you, they have rejected me from being king over them just as they have done to me, from the day I brought them up out of Egypt to this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so also they are doing to you." (1 Samuel 8:7, 8) God says that they can have a king, but 'you have to go back and tell them exactly what that means.'

So Samuel does and this is what he says. "These will be the ways of the king who will reign over you: He will take your sons and appoint them to his chariots and to be his horseman, and to run before his chariots; and he will appoint for himself commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and some to plow his ground and to reap his harvest, and to make his implements of war. He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive orchards and give them to his courtiers. He will take one-tenth of your grain and your vineyards and give it to his officers and his courtiers. He will take your male and female slaves, and the best of your cattle and donkeys, and put them to his work. He will take one-tenth of your flocks and you shall be his slaves." (1 Samuel 8:11-17) Samuel

explains this to the people of Israel and the people responded, “OK. We want a king.” So they start a long line of kings.

Now, admittedly, there are some differences between the lists that I just read to you from the 1 Samuel, Chapter 8, and what a 21<sup>st</sup> century king would be about, but in essence, though, what a king is really called to do is to take care of the people and to look after the country. That is kind of what a president does, but not really. The thing is, if we had a king, even if we were familiar with this whole concept of kingship, the king of kings that Christ proclaims to be is absolutely unlike the kind of king that we had in 1 Samuel. Because what did Jesus do? He died! On a cross! In a public humiliating execution! I mean, what kind of a king is going to lead the people from his grave?

There **are** those of us who look at Christ as king; but then, we have different concepts of what it is to call Jesus, King. There are those folks who really like the concept of Jesus, but they don't really want him to cause an impact on their lives. 'I want Jesus to save my soul, but just don't touch my life style.' 'I'm a Christian, but that is not going to stop me from treating people disrespectfully, or cheating on my income tax return, or looking out for Number 1 lifestyle.'

In our Colossians text, from this morning, we heard that being a believer **does** impact the way in which we are called to live. Verse 13, “God has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” We are called to change our ways from the powers of darkness into this new life in Christ. We are called to change our ways from looking out for number one to looking out for others. We are called to be different from this world.

There are those who think of Jesus as sort of the icing on the cake of life. Or, as sometimes referred to, as “Country Club Christians.” You know, “I am going to show up at church once a week so everyone knows that I am a member. It is not going to affect how I live the rest of the week, but I am here Lord and I am paying my dues, so you are going to take me when the time comes.” Colossians 1, vs. 11, says “May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience.” A little difficult to get prepared in only an hour a week. We need to remember that Christ has been around forever. He was there at the beginning, and will be there long past this world as we know it. Again as we heard in verse 16, “Christ is the image of the invisible God, the first born of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers . . . all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together.” Christ is timeless. Christ speaks to all generations. It is the humans who drive others away. It is the humans, not Christ who set the bad example.

So why are you here? Why are you here in this place, on this day, at this time? Are you here because you are claiming Christ as King? If you are, what kind of king are you claiming him to be? I mean, the guy's a loser. He died. There are those of us who are here today because we were visiting someone who normally comes here. It is the American tradition to go somewhere with family or fiends, eat too much, and spend way too much than we can afford. If you are visiting here today, welcome and we hope to see you next year. If you are here, though, because you think it will look good on your resume, such as, “Why yes, I'm a member of Trinity Lutheran,” you are here for the wrong reason. If you're here because, well, you know, Jesus makes you feel

good, Jesus always lifts you up, well then, I don't think you have ever read the scriptures, and second, you are here for the wrong reason

Because Jesus is the one who makes no sense to this world. The King who dies on the cross, is anathema to everything that the world, consumerism, that me first, holds dear. If we do, indeed, understand Jesus as the kind of King that he is, we may well end up like Gerd Ludemann. Gerd Ludemann is a professor at the University of Gottingen in Germany. He was a Professor of New Testament and is currently a Professor of History and Literature of Early Christians. In 1988, he wrote a letter to the German weekly *Der Spiegel* and said, "I no longer describe myself as a Christian." Gerd Ludemann wrote, "A Christian is someone who prays to Christ and believes in what is promised by Christian doctrine. So I asked myself: 'Do I pray to Jesus, do I pray to the God of the Bible?' And I don't do that." So this professor, formally of New Testament Theology, stepped down, because he started to comprehend what it meant to be a Christian. He examined his faith, intimately, and realized that he did not believe in this king who willingly gave his life for his people.

Andrew Greeley, a Roman Catholic Priest, a sociologist, commented on the very same thing in an article to *The Chicago Sun-Times*, in January, 2004. "Much of Christianity has been devoted to domesticating Jesus . . . to reducing that elusive, enigmatic, paradoxical person to dimensions we can comprehend, understand and convert to our own purposes. So far, it hasn't worked." Greeley went on to write, "Consider the so-called Jesus seminar that tends to think of Jesus as a peasant sage. Or the well-spun hokum of *The Da Vinci Code*, which portrays him as a married man and father who founded a fertility cult. Or the propensity of political candidates to claim that Jesus is on their side." Greeley concludes his article by saying that whatever image of Jesus you have, if your goal is to find one who comforts you, or who feels right, and you find that Jesus, you can be certain he's no longer the Jesus of the New Testament.

That New Testament King, the carpenter guy, the bleeding savior, the infant in the manger, is the one who calls you. He calls us in love, in grace, and a realization that this life isn't about me. It's about the one who we are called to follow. The One who is, the One who was, and the One who is to come.

Amen.