

November 25, 2012

THE REIGN OF CHRIST

by Marci Morey

Today is a bonus Sunday. Thanksgiving is over except for the soup, and Advent doesn't start until next week. We have weeks and weeks until the New Year, so there is no need to think about resolutions or how things will be different next year. Not yet, that time will come, but we don't need to think about resolutions today. Because Thanksgiving was early this year, we have an extra week between the Macy's parade and *It's a Wonderful Life* to pause and reflect.

You may have noticed this morning's readings and music have a theme of Christ the King. On the church calendar, today is the Reign of Christ Sunday. This is a relatively new addition to the Church calendar, begun in 1925 as a day to celebrate Christ the King. This is a day we remember Jesus Christ is Lord of All!

The story of Jesus doesn't neatly follow the Church calendar. The stories overlap and intertwine and sometimes have more meaning because we know what is to come. Advent and Christmas isn't only about the baby Jesus but also about the end of His earthly life, His Ascension into heaven and everything in between.

When I think of Christ the King, one of the first things to come to mind is Palm Sunday and the crowds shouting, "Hosanna! Son of David! Blessed be the Name of the Lord!" If Jesus were physically alive today and entering the city, I think we might see crowds filling the streets like when the Blackhawks won the Stanley Cup, pressing against Jesus. Confetti raining down in great clouds...and the whole time, the disciples a bit mystified, trying to understand just what was happening. All along the parade route crowds would be shouting, "Hosanna! Son of David! Blessed be the Name of the Lord! Blessed be the King who comes in the name of the Lord!"

This is Jesus the King that we celebrate and remember.

And, at the same time, Jesus the King was a tiny, vulnerable, helpless baby.

His parents knew who Jesus was; they knew the miracle of His birth, but I think they were still surprised when shepherds burst into the cave where they were staying. And then to hear what the shepherds were saying... "Really, Angels? Angels filled the sky and spoke to you? They told you about our Son and where to find us? They told you He is Christ the Lord?" ...These rough and tumble men, shepherds coming in from their fields, knelt and worshiped Christ the King.

Sometime later, maybe as long as two years later, after Mary and Joseph were settled into a house and neighborhood, kings showed up. Real, authentic kings, entourage and everything. Imagine you are Mary, maybe fixing dinner, keeping an eye on the toddler Jesus, or Joseph working in his shop attached to the house, and your neighbor bursts through the door. “Mary! Joseph! Kings! Kings are coming! They’re coming to see Jesus!”

And then those kings come through your door, look around to find your Son, the child an angel announced and more angels sang about, and knelt before him, worshipping and giving gifts.

This, too, is the Jesus the King that we celebrate and remember.

I love the familiar stories about Jesus from the Bible, but where is Jesus the King now?

I don’t know about you, but sometimes I look around the world and it’s difficult for me to see Jesus. It is difficult for me to see Jesus the King.

Our world is broken.

Theologically, I can acknowledge that because sin entered into the world, and because God gives man free will rather than forcing us to obey and worship Him, people do bad things. Some are “small” bad things like holding grudges against our neighbors or co-workers or family members. And some are “big” bad things like violence and manipulating the global economy and war. They are all bad things that hurt those closest to us or people we will never meet.

Scientifically, I can understand that the landmasses of our planet move against each other and cause earthquakes and volcanoes. I know enough about meteorology to understand how a Superstorm like Sandy can grow and batter the New England coast.

But at the same time, it is difficult for me to comprehend how there can be so much pain in the world... personal, individual pain and bigger tragedies that affect thousands or even millions of people... and still we can say Christ Reigns. I don’t understand how two seemingly opposite things can be true, but I believe them both... Our world is broken and in pain and yet, Christ Reigns. Jesus is still the King, even though there is pain in this world.

There is an old legend which says when Jesus had ascended into heaven, the angel Gabriel asked him, “Lord what plans have you made for carrying on your ministry in the world? How will people learn of what you have done for them?”

Jesus responded, “I left that to Peter, James and John, Martha and Mary. They are to tell their friends and their friends will tell other friends until the whole world has heard the good news.”

Gabriel then asked, "What if Peter is so busy with his nets and Martha so full of her housework and the friends so preoccupied that they all forget to tell their friends? Don't you think you should make a 'Plan B'?"

Jesus answered, "I have no Plan B. I am counting on My Children to spread my name and my love."

Jesus left it to us to spread His story, to tell our neighbors and friends that He is King.

There are two broad categories of things we know about Jesus from the Bible. First there are the historical events in His life -- where He was and what he did. Second there are His spiritual teachings – how He taught us to live our lives. Of those two things, I believe that passing along the historical stories is less important than sharing His teachings. And TELLING others about those teachings is less important than LIVING them out.

My challenge to you today is that you live your life in a way that proclaims Jesus is King.

I got to this point writing this sermon and got stuck... what can I tell you about how Jesus is asking you to live your life that you don't already know? What can I say that is not trite?

I can tell you to remember What Would Jesus Do. I can remind you “the greatest of these is love”. I can echo Jesus’ question to His disciples and ask “who do you think Jesus is?” and, if you answer that Jesus is Lord, I could exhort you to live your life like you really believe it. Maybe I could remind you that we are to love God and love our neighbor as ourselves. Or tell you again to look at the sign above the door as you leave today and Live Love.

But do I NEED to say any of that? Is it just repeating what you already know? Is it unnecessary and maybe even a little insulting to remind you of all that? Are any of

you surprised today that I might say that we can proclaim the Reign of Christ by being kind and loving to those around us?

So I took a break from my writing and went shopping, fervently hoping inspiration would strike. It didn't.

I procrastinated a little more because, if there is one thing I excel at, it is putting things off until later, but in the back of my mind I kept thinking about this sermon. When I came back to it, I read through the lectionary scriptures again and something struck me in John. Jesus said in verse 36:

“My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here.”

Essentially, Jesus said “I'm not setting up a physical kingdom and so my disciples are not going to fight you to stop your plans.”

Living our lives like Jesus truly is our King means that we are not angry about what we believe. We don't force it on anyone or berate them if they don't believe the same as us. We aren't afraid of their beliefs. Jesus' Kingship isn't threatened if everyone doesn't agree with us.

The last few years there has been a supposed “War on Christmas”. Supposedly, if I'm out shopping and the clerk at the register hands me my change and says “Happy Holidays” instead of “Merry Christmas,” that somehow diminishes the true meaning of Christmas or diminishes the Reign of Christ. According to those who believe there is a War on Christmas, my proper response would be to correct that clerk, then talk to the manager, tell them how offended I am by hearing “Happy Holidays” and never shop in that store again.

In order to fight the War on Christmas, some would say, I should get angry and fight to change the world and proclaim that Jesus is King. However, anger rarely, if ever, persuades someone to your point of view.

It appears my challenge to you today really is a simple one, and the response that is already familiar to all of us. Simple perhaps, but not easy. Living our lives as though Jesus is King and we are followers of His kingdom is a daily challenge. Our challenge is not to fight the world, attempting to force those around us to conform to our beliefs, but instead our challenge is to love.

This holiday season, remember the infant king and the shepherds and kings who worshiped him, but more importantly remember his teachings. Remember His kingdom is not of this world and fighting to convince others that we are right is not the answer. Remember that the simplest and most difficult thing we can do is to honestly love the world around us.