

This is Christ the King Sunday, the last Sunday of the church year. Next Sunday will start Advent and with that a whole new church liturgical year.

The origin of Christ the King Sunday is relatively new, starting in 1925 with Pope Pious the eleventh. And actually, it started because the pope was concerned about the political ideology in Europe during that time.

He was concerned about secularism in the west and the rise of communism in Russia and fascism in Italy and Spain, and with the early hints of Nazism in Germany. The Pope wanted to assert Christ's authority as being over and above the totalitarian claims of these ideologies.

And interestingly, Christ the King Sunday, was originally held on the same Sunday that us Lutherans observed Reformation Sunday, in October. Which was kind of interesting... There was some controversy about that...

Whether it was intentional or not, that liturgical move basically put Lutherans in an awkward spot. While we were holding up Luther as authoritative, they were holding up Jesus as authoritative. At any rate, it was bad optics for us.

It wasn't until after Vatican II in the 70's that the Catholic world moved Christ the King Sunday to the last Sunday before Advent. And as Lutherans, we were happy to adopt the liturgical change-- it was less awkward for us. So, it's an interesting history, and one that involved a little jockeying between Lutherans and Catholics.

What I'd like to do this morning is to reflect on Kings and Kingdoms, and truth. Metaphors matter, metaphorical language is the only way we have to talk about God. When we say that God is like this or like that, we share our understandings and our experiences of God.

One of my Old Testament professors was concerned about the metaphor of God being like a King. And certainly, it's throughout the bible, Old and New Testaments! My professor thought that the metaphor created a way of thinking about God that wasn't always helpful. And it wasn't that he was against it, as much as he thought we needed to be careful about it.

The primary Christian metaphor for God is the Trinity-- Father, Son and Holy Spirit... It's the language of three in one and one in three. The Trinity is a metaphor of collective action of three, not the action of one... Do you see how that is different than the metaphor of God as the King?

Now, Jesus used the language and metaphors of his time. Living in the Kingdom of Israel, and suffering under the Roman occupation, the language of Kings and Kingdoms was his frame of reference. It was how the people of his time could understand what he was saying.

And so, Jesus develops the metaphor of the Kingdom of God, as a way of explaining how it is entirely different than the Kingdoms the people were so familiar with. The Human Kingdoms that were responsible for so much wrath and destruction.

In other words, when Jesus talked about the Kingdom of God, it was the reverse of how people of that time thought about Kings and Kingdoms. So, can you see how the metaphor of Kings and Kingdoms can be tricky?

When we say Christ is the King, we mean the Kingdom of God has come near in and through Jesus. And this Divine Kingdom is totally unlike any Human Kingdom we've ever known...

In our reading this morning, Pilate asked Jesus, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice." So, how is truth related to Kings and Kingdoms? And how is that different in the Kingdom of God?

One of my favorite scholars, Rene Girard has written extensively about Kingdoms and truth. He developed a whole concept around it known as the scapegoat mechanism...

Let me see if I can explain what this is by telling a few stories... Around late 1340's, the black plague was killing millions of people in Europe.

When communities were affected, people interpreted this as God's punishment. They believed God was not happy with them. They blamed each other and fought with each other. People became more and more anxious and more and more intolerant of each other. People were under a lot of pressure...

In one community, someone noticed that the plague didn't affect their Jewish neighbors. The community got together and decided they were to blame, and they conspired and in a fit of contagion, the Jewish family was killed.

After the event the community seemed to come together. All their former blaming and quarreling with each other was gone, they had all agreed on what was the problem. In fact, there was a new sense of peace and blessing. They interpreted their new harmony as a sign from God that they did the right thing. They believed they were instruments of God's will.

Now, did the black plague occur because of the Jews? Of course not, the truth is that the Jews often had cats as pets, and that kept down the rodent population. And the black plague was spread by fleas carried on rats. The Jews were just simply scapegoated.

Whenever scapegoating is going on, truth is always a casualty. Throughout medieval Europe, this scenario was played out many times.

In fact, on February 14<sup>th</sup>, 1349 on what became known as the "Valentine's Day" massacre, around 2000 Jews were burnt alive in Strasbourg Germany, even before the plague had affected them!

And of course, we experienced this same kind of genocide in the holocaust in the 1940's...

Scapegoating is a terrible thing. And whenever scapegoating is going on, truth about guilt and innocence becomes completely perverted and twisted.

Jesus says, "Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice." Jesus knows how truth becomes perverted... And Jesus knows in his situation, his truth will not be heard...

Pilate then rhetorically asks Jesus, "What is truth?" This little phrase says so much... It reveals that Pilate actually knows a thing or two about truth, he knows Jesus is probably innocent of the charges against him. But he's willing to sacrifice the truth in the interests of being politically

expedient. And exactly because if he doesn't keep the peace, he might be the next victim. Politics and truth are rarely aligned.

The word "Satan" means the accuser, in other words the finger pointer. It's that person who stands up and says, "God is punishing us, we'll all be better off if we get rid of that person." You see it's not only advocating violence, it's advocating violence in God's name. The devil has an ingenious game... causing all kinds of death and violence, and at the same time attributing it to God's will.

This tendency to point our fingers is still with us today, if the sports team is doing badly, we blame the coach. Remember years ago, when the Vikings were struggling, and the crowd started chanting, "Fire Childress, Fire Childress..."

If the company is doing poorly, you fire the CEO... If the country is doing poorly, we vote em out. This is all scapegoating... and the truth about guilt or innocence is completely lost.

Is President Trump guilty of everything he's been accused of? Is Hillary Clinton guilty of everything she's been accused of? For human beings' truth is what we believe it is, and we can be amazingly self-righteous about "our" truth.

The good news today, the Kingdom of God is entirely different than any Human Kingdom we've ever known. And while our truth is often perverted and twisted, Jesus does actually know "the truth."

Jesus died at the hands of scapegoating, exactly so we can see it for what it is. Jesus was killed by people believing they were doing God's will. And through the resurrection we can start to see the truth. All the ways we hurt and marginalize each other.

Jesus is a different kind of King. Christ the King doesn't make victims, Christ the King heals all those who have been falsely accused. And His kingdom is not about violence, but about love and forgiveness...

The God we worship is our Father, Son and Holy Spirit. A relationship of love and interconnectedness, a relationship of peace and abundant reconciliation, a relationship completely pruned of violence and hatred.

And because of God's love for us, we reach out in love to love others. We don't point our fingers at others, we listen so deeply that we are vulnerable to change because of what we hear. We don't bear false witness, we interpret the actions of our neighbors in the best possible light.

The Kingdom of God is about being the body of Christ in this place. And so, with Christ the King, we love the world into being. The Kingdom of God comes with every single act of love and kindness... step by step, little by little...

And we have a lot of that happening around this church, and I believe it because I've seen it!

Amen