

Seated
Ephesians 1: 15-23
Don Lincoln

Christ the King Sunday is the Johnny-come-lately addition to the Christian liturgical calendar. It was instituted in 1925 by Pope Pius XI. Author and theologian Silas Henderson writes of those times, "A world that had been ravaged by the First World War had begun to bow down before the 'lords' of exploitative consumerism, nationalism, secularism, and new forms of injustice. In the face of all that, Pope Pius envisioned a dominion by a King of Peace who came to reconcile all things, who came not to be served but to serve."

A quick historical survey of 1925 reveals the following events:

- Benito Mussolini dissolved the Italian parliament and proclaimed himself dictator.
- In Munich, Adolf Hitler resurrected his political party, and his *Mein Kampf* was published that year.
- US president Calvin Coolidge proposed phasing out the inheritance tax.
- Teacher John Scopes was arrested for teaching Darwin's theory of evolution in a Tennessee school.
- 40,000 members of the Ku Klux Klan paraded in Washington, DC. At that time the Klan had 5 million members, making it the largest fraternal organization in America.
- Immigration to the United States from Italy dropped by nearly 90 percent. Immigration from Britain dropped by 53 percent.
- And the Spanish flu pandemic had ended just seven years prior but the nation was still reeling from its results.¹

Leaders on the world stage taking hold in autocratic fashion. Fascism on the rise. Racial tension in the United States. Larger gaps between the rich and the poor. Questioning the validity of newly proclaimed science. And a pandemic from which the world was still recovering. Sound familiar?

Where's Christ the King when you need Him?

He is here. Here and now. King of Kings; Lord of Lords; Christ the KING!

But what does it mean for you and me when we say and proclaim with the church “Christ the King”? Who is this one of whom Paul speaks in our text today, “God put this power in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion.” Who is this King?

How many of you have ever played the game of checkers? It’s been several decades for me - a long time, but I can still remember like yesterday my favorite thing in checkers: “King Me!!!!” Which usually meant now I can beat the living daylights out of you and run the board. Far too often that same spirit is what’s been implied frequently with kings.

The worldly king has you pay taxes to build up his own estate, to take care of the needs of the royal household. What does **THIS** King of Kings ask you to do with your “taxes?” Feed the hungry. Take care of the widow and the orphan.

Earthly kings separate themselves from the masses – living in lavish settings, guarded by dozens, occasionally viewed in the window with a supposedly beneficent hand wave.

This King was born in a manger, and lived with the lowly and cared for the least; with no place to lay His head, and spent His days walking the streets in the fields with the common people.

In a world where kingly hats are adorned with precious jewels – crowns emblazoned with diamonds and rubies and sapphires set in massive forgings of precious gold, we are reminded this King of Kings’ only crown was made of thorns.

Monarchs rule from mighty thrones, carved of rare and exotic woods, set high above the multitude of servants. The only throne of this King was a common tree, in two pieces, raised up high so others could mock Him.

This Jesus is a King whose rules are different. Love your neighbor as yourself, and your enemy too while you’re at it. Love, not enslave; love, not pillage; love, not plunder or rape or conquer.

This is a King whose way of ruling is different. A King who came not to be served, but to serve.

There have been times when instead of embracing the countercultural possibility of a humble, wounded king, Christianity has given itself over to a version of kingship that is all about domination, supremacy, triumphalism, and greatness. Like so many, you and I can fall in love with the loud, the muscular, the aggressive, and forget that the essential power Jesus wielded on earth was the power to give Himself away.

He’s the king whose displays of power included riding on a donkey instead of a warhorse, washing dirty feet, hanging on a cross. How do we go from this God of kenosis — the God who empties himself of all privilege, the God who perpetually pours Himself out and

surrenders His own life for all His loved ones — how did we go from a self-emptying God to God as Iron Man?²

The real business of Christianity is and always has been bending the knee to King Jesus. And where will we find Him?

If we had read the lectionary's Gospel lesson for this Christ the King Sunday we would have found it in Matthew, and we would have heard where Jesus is. "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison and did not take care of you?

Then He will answer them, "Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me."

Jesus tells us He is in the least and the lost and the broken and the wounded. Jesus is in the un-pretty places. In the bodies we don't discuss in polite company. In the faces from which we turn away. In the parts of town we avoid.

It's not that you and I earn our way to majestic King Jesus by caring for the vulnerable. It is that majestic King Jesus, by His own choice and volition, has stooped and surrendered in such a way that He IS the vulnerable. That's where King Jesus can be found, He says.

The Church is about to enter Advent, a season of waiting, longing, and listening, hoping for the Christ to come. We will wait for the light to dawn, for the first cries of a vulnerable baby to redefine kingship, authority, and power forever.

And today, you and I are asked to remember that every encounter we have with "the least of these" is an actual encounter with the King of Kings, the one we call Jesus. It's not a metaphor. It's not wordplay. It's Him.³ And how you and I respond to Him is a sign of our devotion to Him and to the ways of His kingdom continuing to break in in our world.

May it be so. AMEN

1. Libby Howe, *Christian Century*, Living the Word, November 4, 2020.

2. Debi Thomas, www.JourneywithJesus.net, "You Did It To Me"; November 15, 2020.

3. *ibid.*