

**Sermon**  
**McCarter Presbyterian Church**  
**Christ the King Sunday**  
November 24, 2019

**Old Testament Lesson**

Psalm 145:10-13

**NT Lesson and Subject of Sermon**

Colossians 1:3-4, 11–20      NRSV

In our prayers for you we always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, for we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints.... 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, while joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light. He 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. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn 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. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.

**Christ the King**

Christ the King Sunday is the final day of worship for us in the **church calendar**. Next week is the first of Sunday of **Advent**, and that begins the new church year. So, as we end one year and start another we will not sing Auld Lang Syne or toss back sparkling wine. Instead, we will look upon the culmination of a year's observance of the **Gospel story**, our approach to God, our **worship** of God, and our **service** to God. Through this church year, we progressed through Advent, our Christmas Eve Service, **Epiphany**, Ash Wednesday, **Lent**, Easter Sunday, **Pentecost**, several Sundays with names, like the Baptism of Jesus, and many other unnamed Sundays which we lump together as **Ordered Time**. All of those Sundays of worship should lead us to this day, in which we recognize the special aspects of **Christ, who is our King**: In fact, this is one reason we refer to Christ Resurrected as our **Risen Lord**.

So, in view of this, it struck me that there is more than one way to approach this sermon title and this **day of recognition**. We will engage with a couple of them, but we should understand that it has nothing to do with earthly power, long robes, fancy carriages, or any of the trappings of royalty that we see in the media today, or that were celebrated in the past. I say this, because I am anxiously going through Season 3 of the Netflix series, “**The Crown**,” taking in the depiction of the life of Queen Elizabeth and the royal family of England. Among the attractions are the wealth and luxury that surround the royal family. But, the series reveals the human qualities which these fellow human beings share with us all. Their unique position is that their many **imperfections** are in a setting that is held to perfection and continuous **public review** and criticism.

And, if you are a product of Sunday school and Vacation Bible School, as I am, you probably put Christ and God in the same setting of a **royal throne** and a crown amid the clouds or whatever you and I conceive as heaven. Certainly, there is language like this throughout the **scriptures**, but I truly believe that God and Christ, and the Holy Spirit, are beyond those **trappings** that we put on them. Because, the relationship of God with us is more complicated than that; and, the primary example is that of **Christ himself**.

**Christ**, fully human and fully divine, **one with God**, came into the world in a humble, very non-royal setting in **Bethlehem**. Jesus of Nazareth grew and was reared by earthly parents. He grew into adult life, very likely completing a very humbling apprenticeship with his earthly father: He was the son of a worker of wood and stone. Many *Bible* scholars believe that he lived in nearby Capernaum and helped to construct the Roman buildings there. With that in the background, as he neared his thirtieth birthday he took up **his call** in a very special way and set himself apart from everyone through his ministry, his **words**, his healing, and his **insights** into faith. He expanded **spiritual meaning** and identity. He impacted worship, showed **compassion**, and met every obstacle with an unflagging dedication to the **work of God**. As someone who came late to seminary and ordination as a pastor, I would call the path of Jesus the ultimate **second-career**.

So, following the resurrection and ascension we have the **Risen Christ**, which is the image that I favor: Returned to God, **all-powerful**, now removed from this earthly existence. Not everyone shares that image, because we would like Jesus beside us at all times. For me, that is the role of **God’s Spirit**, which means that I honor **the Trinity** in a big way. And, I prescribe to that because I encountered so many people over the years who really want Jesus in their pocket, to pull out at their pleasure to conquer their latest crisis through Christ’s supernatural powers. This is not a very powerful image of Christ at all. It attempts to control Christ and God’s power, when the opposite is actually true. The writer of *Colossians* spells it out for us:

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn 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.

*Colossians 1:15-16 NRSV*

The other important aspect of Christ is that of the **humble servant**. This is how Christ lived: apart from the crowd, but **accessible**. He was living in a special role, but remained a servant to all. He washed the feet of his disciples, but he also was able to heal and inspire them

and others through **God's power** that resided **in him**. His extraordinary life ended in confrontation with religious and **political authority**. Crucified as an enemy of the government, God conquered death and **resurrected Jesus**. Then, **Christ ascended** and returned to God. What remains with us is the amazing story of his life and work, which we call the Gospel, **the church** he called, and the **Holy Spirit**. Now, Christ **reigns in power** with God: That is **Christ the King**.

So, this sequence of events places Christ in a **high position** for us mentally, spiritually, and theologically. In contrast, if Christ is in your hip pocket then Christ is not even a friend, but is **serving you** at your will. This type of **diminishment** of God and Christ is counter to what we believe as Presbyterians. We hold to the **Reformed tradition** that **Christ is King**, reigning all-powerful with God, giving us **commands** as individual believers and as **the church**. And, **God's Spirit** remains with us to provide us strength and guidance and **hope**, because the things that God asks **seem impossible** at first. Like the scripture story of the father who wanted his son saved from a lifetime of self-destruction, we have **unbelief** to deal with (*Mark 9:16-29*). **God helps** our unbelief, strengthens us, upholds us, and offers us an infinite source of **joy and strength**. Through Christ, the **burden is light** and the yoke of our labor is **eased** in unexplainable ways. Because of **God's power in Christ**, the improbable becomes **reality**, and nothing seems impossible.

Like the modern media, we often treat royalty poorly. Hans Christian Anderson is famous for the fable of "The Emperor's New Clothes," in which a child informs the great emperor and a huge crowd that the most powerful person in the empire is parading in public with no clothes on. Like that fable, sometimes we want to **strip Christ bare** and redress him and reshape him and **reclothe him** just the way we want. That is our imperfect **human condition** tearing at something beyond ourselves, probably because we cannot fully understand it.

But, writer and editor **Jill Duffield** reminds us in her recent article that Jesus came to us to "save the world not through military might and worldly wealth but through vulnerable, sacrificial love." And, all of us "who know this ultimate truth are to proclaim this to all the other powers" which are "fighting to reign in our hearts and in the world." And, we can believe this because "Jesus rules in government offices and on the streets..., urging all to see in one another the image of God, to know of God's desire for justice and to participate" fully in the world in all its messiness. "Jesus is Lord in those places of great abundance and those of soul crushing scarcity, calling on people to work to make sure everyone has enough. Jesus reigns in us when we seek his kingdom first, that kingdom of light where darkness no longer rules." (Duffield, Outlook, <https://pres-outlook.org/2019/11/christ-the-king-sunday-november-24-2019/>), Nov. 22, 2019 at 1300 EDT.) As the hymn-like words of *Colossians* tell us:

He 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.

Colossians 1:13-14 NRSV

Because of this, **Christ the King** means that we have a sense of **separation** from the rest of the world, because we follow the One who is **above all things**. Frequently, we are afraid of the disorder we see in the world and begin looking for a **shield** from unpleasantness and **horror**. And, we want Christ to take that role. That can happen, but not as something that we control or manipulate. Instead, **Christ** remains the **image of God** and God's love and God's power as the resurrected and **Risen Christ**. And, because of God's power Jesus remains the **Good Shepherd**, the role in which he "tends to the weak, rescues the lost, comforts those who mourn and binds up the brokenhearted and in so doing reveals the transformative power of God." "We are called to do likewise, revealing to others who really holds power over us." (Duffield, Outlook, <https://pres-outlook.org/2019/11/christ-the-king-sunday-november-24-2019/>), Nov. 22, 2019 at 1300 EDT.)

Through that example, **Christ the King** continues to **call** to us. Because of this, you and I must give way to what **God requires** of us. That seems daunting and upsetting, because it means a lifetime of **service and unselfish love** for others. But, that is the **message** of Christ the King.

That is our task for today and **forever**.

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