

The Last Sunday after Pentecost
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11-26-06

Daniel 7:9-14
Psalm 93:1-3,6
Revelation 1:1-8
Mark 11:1-11

In a few weeks we will celebrate the end of the calendar year 2006 and the beginning of 2007. However, for those of us who follow the Christian calendar, *this* is the last Sunday of the year—the church year, that is. Isn't it nice for a change, for the church to be actually a whole month ahead of the rest of the world? I find it helpful to think of the year as a circle, not a line—like an analog clock, not a calendar. But for us enfleshed beings, the year is not so much a circle as a spiral. Living in time, we spin around the year, but when we return to the same place, it's no longer the same. It has moved away, or we have moved away, or both. Well, ready or not, the first Sunday of Advent and the beginning of the new church year is next Sunday. Today, the last Sunday, we celebrate the feast of Christ the King.

This is an important day for us--as a time to remember who we are, and *whose* we are. For Christians, this time of year challenges us, once again, to reflect on how our core values are not necessarily the same as those of the world around us.

We celebrate Christ the King. But what kind of king is Christ? And over what kind of kingdom will he reign? And what does he mean to us? Those are the questions I want to address right now.

First, Christ is someone who understands us. Why? Because he has walked our path, walked in our shoes, experienced what we experience. When we take our concerns to Christ, we know he understands because he's been there. He knew the pain of rejection, disappointment, grief, and all the other emotions that make it so hard to be human.

He's also someone who has set a standard for us. Remember the question that was so popular a few years ago: "What would Jesus do?" It's still a good question. How can we make this a better world? Show the world Jesus. Let his love, mercy, and forgiveness stand against the cruelty, hatred and violence of a dark world.

Sometimes I think we make Jesus too laid-back. Because we try to emphasize his grace, we sometimes ignore the challenges he made to his followers. There are certain things expected out of one who would be his follower.

In this day and time when Christians act like everyone else, we may wonder if we've gone too far to make the gospel acceptable to everyone. A faith purchased too cheaply may have little hold on our loyalties.

Please don't misunderstand. We are saved by grace, not works. But Jesus placed his people in the world to be salt, to be leaven, to be a light set on a hill. People should be able to tell that we are his. Isak Dinesen, in her book *Out of Africa*, tells the story of a young man from the Kikuyu tribe who worked for her for three months on her farm. Suddenly he announced that he was leaving her to go to work for a Muslim man nearby. Surprised, Dinesen asked him if he were unhappy working for her. He told her that all was well, but that he had decided to work for a Christian for three months to study the ways of Christians and then work for a Muslim for three months to study the ways of a Muslim. After experiencing both, he was going to decide whether to be a Christian or a Muslim.

Would a person living in your household for three months be persuaded of the superiority of Christ? I'm haunted by Mahatma Gandhi's remark that the only thing that kept him from becoming a Christian...was Christians.

Today we read in Mark's Gospel that Christ, our King, stopped and sent his disciples looking for a donkey. He rode that donkey into Jerusalem. What does it mean to be a subject of Christ, our King—who rides a donkey?

In a parish I served sometime ago, I became acquainted with a woman whose name was Georgene. Georgene told me about an earlier time in her life when she believed that God could not possibly love her. She had made many wrong choices in life and she "knew" that God was going to condemn her to eternal damnation. So many bad choices led her to believe that good choices just weren't available to her. Well, by the time I met her, she was—by the grace of God, on her way to reaching out and accepting God's love and forgiveness. The freedom she was beginning to feel, knowing that God's love surrounded her, was palpable. How are we going to live as followers of the King? Jesus shared a vision for a people and a nation. Being subjects to Christ, our King, calls us to reach out to people like Georgene; it also calls us to become as she became.

The "kingdom" of Christ exists in the human heart and calls us to respond with mercy and good faith. Our true claim to Christ as our "King" lies in the attitude of joy and gratitude reflected in the way we live our lives. Our claim to Christ as our King lies in embracing a vision of one another as sisters and brothers in Christ; our claim to Christ as our King lies in a vision of the world centered in the spirit of hope and compassion.

Praise be to Christ the King. Amen.