



ST. MARK'S ON THE CAMPUS

Episcopal Church & Student Center

1309 R Street * Lincoln, NE 68508 * (402) 474-1979 * www.stmarks-episcopal.org

The Rev. Jerrold Thompson, Rector
Sermon for Christ the King 2007
St. Mark's on the Campus
November 25, 2007

This morning we mark the last Sunday after Pentecost, the final Sunday before we begin a new church year with the season of Advent. This Sunday is also known as the Feast of Christ the King.

What do most of us think of when we think of kings and queens, of royalty? We might think of Prince Charles and Princess Di. If we're a bit younger Prince William might come to mind. If we're a bit older, we might think of Queen Elizabeth II, or of her much loved mother. If we have a literary or historical bent – or we're into movies -- the first Queen Elizabeth might come to mind. Or, if we grew up Roman Catholic, or if we have a particular devotion to Jesus' mother, Mary Queen of Heaven might pop up for us. Of all those figures, Jesus' mother is the closest to what we envision this day as we mark the reign of God in Jesus Christ, the "King of kings, and Lord of lords," as we prayed in our collect.

Our gospel this morning connects God's reign manifest in Jesus with His crucifixion. Not only is he King of kings and Lord of lords, but also he is Servant of servants. In fact, he is most clearly king of kings as he serves. The image we hold before us this morning is not the victory of Christ reigning in glory at some future point, or even reigning in the glory of the resurrection.

No, we hold before our eyes and before our hearts the glory of Christ reigning from the cross: Christ reigning not from a throne of plush comfort and absolute power but reigning from what one of our collects in Morning Prayer calls “the hard wood of the cross”; Christ reigning from a position of weakness, completely vulnerable to the sin of the world -- and to the love of the world.

We proclaim this morning that the reign of God looks more like Jesus on the cross than any other kind of power we encounter. It’s critical for us to acknowledge the apparent absurdity of that proclamation in a world where people use themselves to blow up those with whom they disagree, and where nations attack other nations in order to replace one form of government with another – all too often saying that their actions are based in religious faith.

In a world where power is too often used in an effort to control rather than to serve, God suffering on the cross out of love calls us to a new way of living together, not only as individuals but also as nations. We Christians proclaim that the way of the cross is actually the more powerful way, the most powerful way -- the way that *God* reigns in the world, and the way that *we* can participate in God’s kingdom.

Our bulletin insert this morning talks about the ONE campaign to end global poverty. It includes that deeply disturbing statistic that every three seconds someone dies of poverty. That would mean that in the course of our celebration of this holy meal this morning, about 1200 people will die because of their poverty. Twelve hundred people.

What is the way of the cross in that situation? How do we make ourselves vulnerable to the sin and the pain in the world, loving and serving our neighbor? The way of the cross, the way of God, calls for some fairly serious change in the world. Change always begins with ourselves, with the daily choices we make that affect the rest of God’s creation.

With choosing not necessarily the lowest cost item for gifts this Christmas, but instead paying attention to where those gifts come from. Are they supporting sweat shops and child labor? With choosing to buy coffee that supports fair trade and helps to lift those who raise it out of poverty. With asking if the food we buy is raised responsibly and humanely, with sensitivity to the earth and the people who care both for crops and the animals with whom we share the earth. And by choosing to purchase only food that is.

If we are going to serve others with whom we share God's world, if we are going to live the way of the cross and participate in God's kingdom, it will require sacrifice on our part. We Christians aren't surprised by that. Rather than unintentionally supporting poverty among our neighbors, we can *intentionally* make choices to help lift them out of it because they, too, are children of God, and because as followers of Jesus, we choose to participate in "the restoration of all things," as we prayed a few minutes ago in our collect.

In our gospel this morning, Jesus hangs between two criminals, one on his right and one on his left. You might remember that those positions are precisely the ones that the disciples argue about who deserves at those places of honor. After Luke tells us about these two criminals, he immediately portrays Jesus as saying, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." To whom is Jesus referring?

Is it the criminals, one of whom derides and mocks him, suggesting that Jesus save both himself and them – and the one who recognizes Jesus' innocence and requests Jesus' mercy? Or is Jesus asking his father's forgiveness on the crowd of people, those who stand by and watch everything that is happening? Carol occasionally quotes someone as saying that all that is necessary for evil to flourish is for a few good people to do nothing. Is Jesus asking forgiveness for those of us who stand by and watch as poverty flourishes, failing to do what we can?

Or is Jesus asking forgiveness for the Roman soldiers, those who offer him sour wine to drink and tease him, "Save yourself, you King of the Jews!" Is Jesus asking forgiveness for those who identify so strongly with their particular nation and their way of life that they mock those outside of it?

It appears that Luke's ambiguity is quite deliberate, that he wants to include all kinds of people, all kinds of sinners in this intercession of Jesus – because that's the way of the cross. Jesus intercedes on behalf of people like you and me, and on behalf of people whom we might judge more harshly than we judge ourselves.

That collect I mentioned before, the one that refers to the hard wood of the cross, asks that all people might be brought within the reach of Christ's saving embrace.

All people.

Not just a few.

Not just some lucky ones.

Not just you and me

All people.

The way of the cross, the reign of God, is made manifest through us when we make ourselves vulnerable to others – to their sin, to their love – and when we choose as Jesus did sometimes to suffer because of that vulnerability, so that the world might be brought a little closer to true freedom in the reign of God.

May God grant us the will to follow the way of the cross, and the strength and the courage to do what *we* are called to do.

Amen.