

Sermon

The Rev. Poulson Reed

November 22, 2009

Proper 29 B – Christ the King and Commitment Sunday

In the name of God, who was, and is, and is to come. Amen.

Next Sunday we begin a new liturgical year with the first Sunday of Advent. But today, the last Sunday of the Church year, we celebrate the feast of Christ the King. What does the image of Christ as king mean to you?

As Americans in a system of representative government, we don't tend to think much about kings or kingship. And when we do, we lump royalty in with our notion of celebrity (Princess Diana and the like) or push it aside into the category of quaint customs in distant lands or times long past. But today's feast reminds us that we are all subject to a king, though not an earthly one. Christ is our king, with authority over each of us, whether we recognize that authority or not.

And yet, Christ's kingship is altogether different from the authority we see exercised by most human rulers, royal or otherwise. Most leaders disappoint us from time to time, even those we support. And those with the most power tend to disappoint us the most. They grasp at power too readily, or use that power unwisely; they are too easily influenced by interest groups, or corrupted by greed. Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely, as the saying goes.

Human beings are flawed creatures, and those flaws show up more easily in the bright light of followers' attention. Even our very best human leaders, our favorite presidents and politicians, community leaders and rectors will

let us down at some point. If I haven't let you down yet on anything, just give it time and I surely will!

But Christ was and is a radically different kind of leader: compassionate but utterly reliable, supremely powerful and genuinely humble, a king and a servant, God who made the universe but gave himself up for a humiliating death, the Lord of Lords yet born in a stable. No wonder he danced around Pilate's question: "are you the king of the Jews?" The answer was "yes" of course. But he was king of so much more, too. "My kingdom is not from this world," he said, and how right he was.

God's kingdom is **not** from this world. But how often we wish it were.

For even though we know that Christ, the servant king, has won for us the victory through the cross; still, we look around in vain sometimes for the results of that triumph. War, terrorism, swine flu and economic meltdown: the kingdom of God seems a distant hope in the midst of our troubled world.

We know Christ has turned the tide, that evil **will** be defeated by good, and death overcome by love. The pendulum has begun its descent. God's decisive blow has been struck, but like an animal with a deadly wound, evil thrashes about with seemingly limitless strength.

The kingdom of God **is** coming, but why so slowly? There are no answers to the question: when will God's kingdom be completed here on earth? And yet, we continue to pray daily for it: "thy kingdom come, thy will be done."

And here at All Saints', we may have mixed feelings too, in our individual lives and as a community of faith: hope and anxiety, excitement and worry. I know I do. For in addition to being Christ the King Sunday, we also

celebrate Commitment Sunday, the formal end of our pledge campaign season. And I wish that I had better news, a more decisive victory.

To be sure, many have given generously to support our mission and ministry in 2010. Many of us have increased our pledges from last year, and some are giving sacrificially, making pledges in the midst of financial uncertainty and even unemployment. Let me be clear: I am truly grateful for **all** the pledges we have received this year, in the midst of this awful recession. I give thanks for every pledge, large and small.

And yet, we find ourselves well short of both of our goals. As of today, we have received \$758,000 toward our goal of \$1.2 million, and 408 pledging households toward our goal of 650. In both of these measurements, with all of the generosity we have seen from so many, we are still only at 63% of our goals.

I know for some, giving more was simply not possible. For those in financial distress, please do **not** give more than you can. Even the smallest pledge from you is gladly received as a sign that you support what we are trying to accomplish here at All Saints’.

But among those of us who are financially healthy, I fear that too many of us still think of our pledge as one contribution among many, as a dollar amount instead of a percentage. What percentage of your income does your pledge represent? Not many of us give the Biblical standard of the tithe, 10%. But how many of us even give 5% or 3%?

We will, of course, keep our pledge goals open throughout the rest of this year and 2010. I hope that those who have not yet pledged will still do so, and that others may increase your pledge, if you are able, as the year progresses. But in terms of our focus as a community, it is time to move on

to other things. Our public emphasis on pledging will wind down, and we have already begun to build a budget based on what we have received.

At times in our recent past, All Saints' has relied on deficit budgets to soften the blow of weak giving. We no longer have that luxury. We will be good stewards of the resources we have received by passing a balanced budget, and we will stretch every dollar for the maximum output of ministry. I can tell you already that there will be some painful cuts in our 2010 budget.

But like many of your families, we will be creative with what we have in lean times. We will make the most of our resources, prioritizing ministries that are life-giving, that really make a difference. We will do our part to join with God in making the kingdom of God real in Phoenix and beyond.

And that, my friends in Christ, is where our hope lies. Our hope, our faith is based on a kingdom that is not of this world. That is why we must not lose heart, even when times seem tough. God has already given us everything we need to do God's will. WE are the resources we need. Not money, nor staff, not buildings or programs. As our reading today from the Revelation to John reminds us: "God made us to be a kingdom." WE are the kingdom of God.

The kingdom is here already, with us and in us, if we would but see it. Jesus will come again and the kingdom will be completed and its final work done, but until that time, God relies on us. We have been blessed, each of us, and as a community. Will we be a blessing to others, not with our wallets, but in our lives? We can make a difference, by God's grace.

That's why, at the end of the day, I'm not that worried about pledges, **if** we commit to being the kingdom of God. If we work together, if we follow Christ as his disciples this coming year, we can change the world, person by

person, encounter by encounter. If each of us pledges to lead a more faithful life, to praying, learning and serving together, led by Christ, our King, amazing things will happen. That's our high calling. Let's commit, this Commitment Sunday, to that. Amen.