

The Lessons Appointed for Use on the

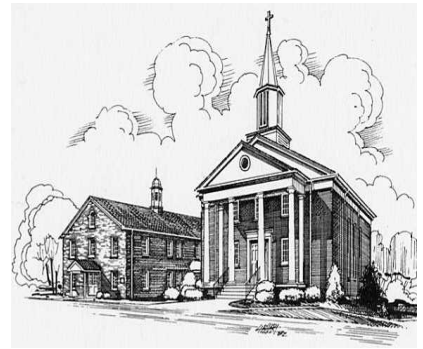
Last Sunday after Pentecost

Christ the King

Proper 29

Year B

RCL



Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14

Psalms 93

Revelation 1:4b-8

John 18:33-37

The Collect

Almighty and everlasting God, whose will it is to restore all things in your well-beloved Son, the King of kings and Lord of lords: Mercifully grant that the peoples of the earth, divided and enslaved by sin, may be freed and brought together under his most gracious rule; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14

As I watched,
 thrones were set in place,
 and an Ancient One took his throne,
 his clothing was white as snow,
 and the hair of his head like pure wool;
 his throne was fiery flames,
 and its wheels were burning fire.

A stream of fire issued
 and flowed out from his presence.

A thousand thousands served him,
 and ten thousand times ten thousand stood attending
 him.

The court sat in judgment,
 and the books were opened.

As I watched in the night visions,
 I saw one like a human being
 coming with the clouds of heaven.

And he came to the Ancient One
 and was presented before him.

To him was given dominion
 and glory and kingship,

that all peoples, nations, and languages
should serve him.

His dominion is an everlasting dominion
that shall not pass away,
and his kingship is one
that shall never be destroyed.

Psalm 93 Page 722, BCP

Dominus regnavit

- 1 The LORD is King; he has put on splendid apparel;
the LORD has put on his apparel and girded himself
with strength.
- 2 He has made the whole world so sure that it cannot
be moved;
- 3 Ever since the world began, your throne has been
established; you are from everlasting.
- 4 The waters have lifted up, O LORD, the waters have
lifted up their voice; the waters have lifted up their
pounding waves.
- 5 Mightier than the sound of many waters, mightier
than the breakers of the sea, mightier is the LORD
who dwells on high.
- 6 Your testimonies are very sure, and holiness adorns
your house, O LORD, for ever and for evermore.

Revelation 1:4b-8

Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.

To him who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood, and made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Look! He is coming with the clouds;
every eye will see him,
even those who pierced him;
and on his account all the tribes of the earth will wail.

So it is to be. Amen.

“I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.

John 18:33-37

Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” Jesus answered, “Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?” Pilate replied, “I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?” Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here.” Pilate asked him, “So you are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.”

SERMON

I was challenged by one of our Internet congregation this week about last Sunday's sermon. She was offended by my statement, when I said:

That is, I believe, what those of us called to be Christians are called to do – to offer up our lives to something greater than we are to try to give shape to the ongoing business of creating a world at peace with itself. Those who have not been called to the Gospel, even the very good, decent sorts for whom, nevertheless, all this churchiness is a closed book, see nothing greater than themselves and thus cannot be called to give up their lives to something greater, for they see no such thing.

Our sister complained, saying,

“... at one point in your sermon you say or imply that only those who follow the gospel can put the welfare of the world above the welfare of themselves. Surely this is not what you meant?”

She went on to say, “It is not only the gospel that professes that view. . . .same with Buddhist Philosophy,

and probably the Koran, too ...”

She is a nice, caring non-Christian lady, and she is reacting to what many nice, caring non-Christian people see as the Christian tendency to claim all righteousness for themselves and to offer only judgment to non-Christians. When radical followers of Islam do that to us, calling us “infidels”, we get our back up. Why we wouldn’t expect non-Christians to get their back up when we do it to them is a mystery to me. No one enjoys being called an infidel, however it is phrased.

Of all the people now living, the one I hold in highest esteem is the Dalai Lama. I have read his words. I have seen him speak. He is a man of very great peace, very great strength, very great courage and very great learning. He is not, of course, a Christian. If **he** is such a great guy, what is, then, unique about Christianity such that I would make the statement I made? What sets Christians apart if it isn’t that we’re better people than,

say, the Dalai Lama? Let's look at his words first.

The Dalai Lama first notes that all major religions share some common goals:

All major religious traditions carry basically the same message, that is love, compassion and forgiveness. The important thing is they should be part of our daily lives¹.

He is, of course, quite correct in this. It is in the areas of love, compassion and forgiveness that all major religious traditions overlap. A devout Buddhist and a devout Christian volunteer at a soup kitchen. So what? Who holds that end of the serving spoon is not in the least important to the one being fed.

His Holiness then sets out what makes his religion unique:

This is my simple religion. There is no need for temples; no need for complicated philosophy. Our own brain, our own heart is our temple; the philosophy is kindness².

1 <http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/d/dalailama402129.html#IMS9sXg0Sdw7pp3T.99>

2 Ibid.

That is not the same thing as saying that all major religious traditions are basically the same. They are not. Their goals may overlap, indeed, do overlap, but they are not the same. The difference, it seems to me, is just what I said last Sunday, the thing which offended my friend.

Those who have not been called to the Gospel, even the very good, decent sorts for whom, nevertheless, all this churchiness is a closed book, see nothing greater than themselves and thus cannot be called to give up their lives to something greater, for they see no such thing.

The difference between the religion of the living man I hold in highest esteem, and the path I follow is this: He believes that his own brain and his own heart is sufficient to guide him. I confess that I am guided by something greater than my own brain and my own heart, and that to heed this something greater, I must submit myself to being led, and have faith that I **am** be-

ing led in the ways that please my God. I confess Christ the King.

This whole submit-yourself-to-being-led-by-an-invisible-God thing sounds awfully foolish to those who are not called to the name of Christ. I really can't blame them at all. If, like the Dalai Lama, you believe that your brain, your experience, your analysis and your sense of morality is all the temple you need, you are going to be baffled by people who insist on ascribing truth to stories in an ancient library of Books which relate things foreign to your experience or your analysis. You simply will be driven to conclude that such people are daft or deluded or both.

Those who do not sense the guiding hand behind Creation, the materialists who think that matter and space just popped into existence for no discernible reason, also believe that the matter that popped organized itself into the marvels of the human knee by an addi-

tional happy fluke. Next time you're in the doctor's office, take a look at that exploded picture of the human knee hanging on the wall, and you'll see, I think, why I can't accept that explanation.

The view of those who sense God's presence could not be more different, for such people understand the universe not as a random collection of happy accidents, but as the Creation of something which has purposes, and which prefers one thing to another.

Christianity tells people to repent and promises them forgiveness. It therefore has nothing (as far as I know) to say to people who do not know they have done anything to repent of and who do not feel that they need any forgiveness. It is after you have realized that there is a real Moral Law, and a Power behind the law, and that you have broken that law and put yourself wrong with that Power—it is after all this, and not a moment sooner, that Christianity begins to talk³.

Those not called to Christ hear us say things like

3 Mere Christianity (C. S. Lewis)

that, and get their back up. They hear us saying that they are not as fully aware as we are, and it hurts them. It would be better to say we hear and see differently. I, and some of my friends who play Autoharp, were once asked to teach a student who had been profoundly deaf since birth. He had never heard a sound. The difference between a high note and a low note or a loud sound and a soft sound was incomprehensible to him, yet he really, really wanted to learn how to play a tune.

It was quite a challenge, as you can imagine, but, *mirabile dictu!* we did it. Sort of. He did play a tune. And it was similar to the tune we were teaching. Not exactly, though, because he had no way to actually participate in what he was producing.

That is, I think, the consequence of the difference we're talking about. I'm a pretty nice guy. I don't spit into the wind. I don't tug on Superman's cape, or pull the mask off that old Lone Ranger and I certainly don't

mess around with Jim. I'm very likely to hold doors open for people, to give a handout to someone down and out. I'm drawn to suffering and feel compelled to help. In the recent past this was called the "Law of Nature" because it was assumed that everyone knew it by nature, and thus it did not need to be taught, but can you imagine a society where it was otherwise? A society which values slamming doors in people's faces, kicking those down and out, making someone's suffering greater for our own amusement? Those rules of decent behavior, the places, in fact, where all religions overlap, are pretty constant because it would be near impossible to live in a society where they were not agreed.

The toad in the soup bowl, however, is the realization that we talk a better case than we walk. To believe, as the Dalai Lama suggests, that my own heart and mind are sufficient to lead me would be to ignore the other stuff, the less admirable stuff, that I do and then

justify to myself. And no, what I do is none of your business. It's sufficient that I know when I've been a total jackass. Again.

So now, we've whittled it down to a fine point. There are in the world people who feel that their own brain and their own morality are sufficient. As I said, such folk see nothing greater than themselves and cannot thus be called to give up their lives to something greater, for they see no such thing. Can and do they do good things? Of course they do. Sometimes. Do Christians always do good things? Um...no. So, isn't it a difference without a distinction? We wind up the same place. What do we care about the motivation which leads people to lives of caring and compassion? What difference can it make?

The difference is that which we celebrate today, for this Sunday is Christ the King Sunday. We who are called to one of the Abrahamic faiths understand that

the world was spoken into existence by a Creator God who loves His Creation. We who are called to the particular Abrahamic faith of Christianity understand that this incomprehensible, transcendent God who spoke the glory of the universe into existence with a Word, was so anxious to let us know that we are not on our own that He took on flesh and walked among us, submitting Himself fully to our sinfulness, then defeating even that.

I've been very careful to minimize the use of the word "believe" in these discussions because to "believe", in our 21st Century understanding, is all about opinion and the Easter Bunny. Those not called to the name of Christ understand a calling to the name of Christ to be an opinion, a choice, something on the order of believing in the Easter Bunny. Those who confess Christ the King are offended by that, and huff and puff about it to them. The recipients of the aforemen-

tioned huffing and puffing then hear the Christian tendency to claim all righteousness for themselves and to offer only judgment to non-Christians. It's like trying to debate the existence of the color red with a colorblind man. Everybody is going to leave the debate with hurt feelings.

The Presbyterian Church teaches that we love God because He first loved us. His election is not on the basis of any merit of ours, but as a result of God's own inscrutable purpose. Armenians, like the Wesleyans and the Methodists, would say that we can never know how many merchants in Ur God spoke to before Abram responded. Calvinists would say that God elected Abram to hear His voice from the beginning. However it came to be, for those who sense the power for creation behind the world in which we live, there is an obligation of response. Such people are to listen in quietness for that still, quiet voice speaking the words of His Will, and

then do as His Holiness the Dalai Lama counsels:

“The important thing is they should be part of our daily lives.”

Live your life in confession of Christ the King.

Make the words of God revealed to you a part of your daily lives, not merely a part of your devotions. Pray with St. Francis

Lord make me an instrument of Your peace,
Where there is hatred, let me sow love, where
there is injury, pardon
Where there is doubt, faith. Where there is
darkness, light, where there is sadness, joy.
O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much
seek
to be consoled as to console; to be understood
as to understand;
to be loved as to love.
for it is in giving that we receive; it is in par-
doning that we are pardoned;
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal
life.

AMEN

Optional parts of the readings are set off in square brackets.

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