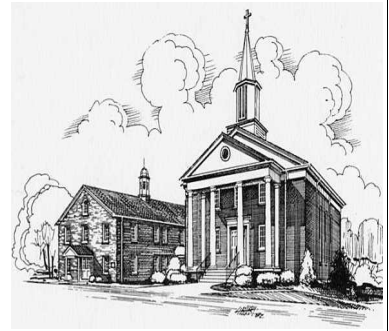


**The Lessons Appointed for Use on the
Last Sunday after Pentecost
Christ the King**

Proper 29

Year B

RCL



Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14

Psalms 93

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.

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

It is Christ the King Sunday, the last Sunday after Pentecost. Next Sunday, we begin Advent, the beginning of the church year when we prepare for the coming of Jesus into the world. What frightens me about Advent and particularly Advent this year, with the events in Paris so fresh in our minds, is the worry that we may have become so comfortable with our Advent and Christmas traditions that we no longer hear the earth shaking reality behind them. People are prone to do that.

I believe I told you of the Buddhist monastery which kept a cat. The cat would wind its way around the monks during prayer and became a distraction. In response, the abbot directed that the cat should be tied up during prayers. Eventually, the cat died and was replaced by another, which was similarly confined during

prayers. The cycle repeated until, years later, a learned text was produced on the importance of tying up a cat during prayers. We're like that. Starbucks puts out cups bearing images of evergreen branches or snowflakes and everybody is happy. Starbucks puts out a plain red cup and people lose their minds. We value our traditions, forgetting that they are but symbols. Human beings are susceptible to eating too fast, so we fail to taste what we are eating. This year we must taste the season of Advent, and the truth it speaks of or face unspeakable consequences. It is possible that there has been no time since the Second World War in which it is more important for people of faith to attend to the witness of Jesus, for there have been few times in which it was more important to recognize the truth of that witness than the present one. That's not going to be easy. We have a Jesus problem. So did Pilate.

Jesus was brought before Pilate.

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.”

That’s the Gospel passage for Christ the King Sunday in Year B. That is what we are to attend to – Jesus’ self-description – but it is the next verse, one not included for today, to which I want to direct your attention.

Pilate asked him, ‘What is truth?’

Pilate has just named his Jesus problem. Now, we need to engage our Jesus problem: It is one thing to believe IN Jesus. It is another thing altogether to believe Jesus. Jesus tells us that He comes “to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my

voice.” When we’re scared silly over an attack on Paris, can we still listen to Him?

You see, we live in a world which mistrusts the word “truth”, just as Pilate did. It is what makes his retort sound so contemporary to me. We don’t admit truth today. We admit only opinions. The unspoken assumption behind Pilate’s question, “What is truth?” is that there is no truth. There is only your opinion, and I don’t share it.

After he had said this, he went out to the Jews again and told them, ‘I find no case against him.’

“The guy has a loopy opinion of himself. So what?” Pilate asks. “The world is full of people with loopy opinions. That’s not a crime.”

That's our Jesus problem in a nutshell. We believe IN Jesus but we find believing Jesus terribly difficult,

the more so when we're frightened. That's not surprising. What Jesus has to tell us, translated into the world in which we live, is outrageous! How in the world can we approach a truth that tells us to love our enemies? The writer of Daniel expressed the truth in florid language and we read it without receiving it for we are too sophisticated for florid language. The truth walked with the people of Jesus's time and they shouted, "Give us Barabbas. We have no king but Caesar." The truth stood before Pilate and he could not receive it for it appeared too humble, too banal.

Advent is the time we stress the other-ness of the Kingdom of God. The here-but-not-yetness of its reality. The fact is that though we are born citizens of a country we have been baptized into a Kingdom that knows no boundaries – a Kingdom as yet without land, but one whose population is alive and well. A true dias-

pora. The manger forces us into a conflict of loyalties, character and virtue with the world in which we live. There is only one way to determine those who are members of this to-be Kingdom: Sacrificial love.

Rev. Bob Barrett, of Yachats Community Presbyterian Church writes:

I preached on the Confession of 1967, at Presbytery Friday night. It is as timely now as it was 50 years ago...

The confession is built around the theme of reconciliation. What I can't understand is how so many "Christian" governors can refuse to accept refugees fleeing persecution and certain death in Syria, while simultaneously celebrating the birth of their refugee savior. How do they reconcile this?

From the Confession, "The church, in its own life, is called to practice the forgiveness of enemies and to commend to the nations as practical politics the search for cooperation and peace. This search requires that the na-

tions pursue fresh and responsible relations across every line of conflict, even at risk to national security, to reduce areas of strife and to broaden international understanding.”

The Jesus I follow would never turn away refugees; would never rejoice at the dropping of bombs, not even on our enemies. Rather, Jesus says “Do not return evil for evil.” “Love your enemies and pray for those that persecute you.” Jesus says to us, “If you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others?”

Jesus is neither neutral, nor ambiguous.

The Presbyterian Church, in its Confession, has named the truth of Jesus, affirming that, “The church, in its own life, is called to practice the forgiveness of enemies and to commend to the nations as practical politics the search for cooperation and peace... even at risk to national security.” Did you hear that? “Practical politics!” Not “pie-in-the-sky wishful thinking”. Practical

politics, even at risk to national security!

The truth of Jesus is radical. It is outrageous. To name it in our time in history is to receive venom and hatred in return as people say things like these, which I collected from Facebook,

“We as Americans need to stand up before it's too late and take our country back! Praise God we will!”

or

“I don't think that we should classify [Muslims] as people who need direction and given any form of kindness or freedom. If you believe you can change them then you are part of the problem.”

And even this, from Franklin Graham no less! “Islam is not a peaceful religion. Our president and our politicians in Washington need to wake up before it’s too late. This is not the time to be politically correct. Our nation’s security is at stake. The future of our children and grandchildren is at stake. We

should not allow any political or religious group who want to destroy us and our way of life to immigrate to this country.”

Did Rev. Graham somehow overlook Leviticus 19:34?

The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the LORD your God.

Can you hear these voices of hatred and xenophobia wrapping themselves in stolen holiness to sell fear in the name of Him who said, “Be Not Afraid”? So many today have a Jesus problem. So many believe IN Him, but refuse to **believe** Him. So many have overlooked the other-ness of the Kingdom of God and the challenges it places before those who claim the name Christian. What of us?

AMEN

BENEDICTION

If the only tool you have is a hammer, all problems appear to be nails. Pilate had only a hammer, and he chose nails to resolve his Jesus problem. The people of faith today must do better than that. Jesus testified to the truth at the cost of his life, mindless of the threat. In His Farewell Address, Jesus said:

Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.'

We are called to accept the testimony of Jesus and live into the Kingdom here and now by believing His testimony. Our enemy isn't terrorists or, God forgive us, Islam. Paul reminded us:

"For we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places."¹

¹ Ephesians 6:12

Our enemy is the forces which cause us to fear more than we love. Terrorists win when they infect us with terror. The opposite of faith is not doubt; the opposite of faith is fear. There are consequences to ignoring the truth of Jesus' testimony.

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

The Bible texts of the Old Testament, Epistle and Gospel lessons are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Church of Christ in the USA, and used by permission.

The Collects, Psalms and Canticles are from the Book of Common Prayer, 1979.

Sermon Copyright © 2015 J. Stewart Schneider
