

Homily for 'Reign of Christ' Sunday

Father David I. Giffen

I speak to you in the Name of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Amen.

Today we gather to celebrate 'Reign of Christ,' or 'Christ the King' Sunday; the final celebration of the church calendar, by which we acknowledge Christ's lordship over humanity, and kingship in the world.

The notions of 'Kingship' and 'Lordship,' in *today's* world, usually infer domination, or political power. They usually point to someone with great influence and control, with the ability to achieve their ends, by virtue of their supremacy; in short, someone who most of us would fear.

This description of authority and kingship is truly not-so-far-off from the understanding, which most Judeans, would have shared about God, in the time before the coming of Christ. In fact, even John the Baptist, who proclaimed the Advent of the messiah, was not far off in *his* understanding of a punitive and vengeful God.

John accepted a theology by which God rewarded or punished Israel according to its obedience or disobedience to God. Because of his fear of God's wrath, he led people out into the wilderness of the Jordan, walking them through its waters, so that they might purify themselves, and be prepared for the imminent *threat* of the mighty Kingship and Reign of God.

As the Roman soldiers arrested Jesus, and brought him to stand before Pilate, I wonder how many, who had followed him as

messiah, would have asked where *that* King they had been promised was, and where was the Lord who would rule over all. When Pilate asked Jesus, "Are you the King of the Jews," I wonder how many wished for him to proclaim 'Yes!' For many had looked for the God they had had been told of, many would have desired the God they thought they knew; a God who would avenge their mistreatment, a God who would take vengeance once and for all.

Whether it is on bumper stickers, or on community church signs, I can't even begin to count the number of times I grimace, at the face of Christianity, distorted in presentation as "Repent or burn!"

The increasingly popular, black and white theology, of many North American evangelical fundamentalist churches, offers a scary portrayal of a God, which harkens back to a time, when the faithful understood themselves, and those around them, to be either in or out, chosen or not. Preachers in these big box churches tend to present a worldview, which demands its followers to adhere to a literal interpretation of scripture, while accepting Jesus Christ as their personal saviour; the consequences of not doing so, resulting in an eternity of fire and hell.

This theological philosophy robs God of any possible compassion or grace, and reduces God, to merely an executioner.

In an era, when the mainline Christian church struggles to maintain relevance in North America – this is the most prevalent face understood to represent the church. For the masses who have not been raised with the Christian narrative, television and movies have reduced Christianity, regardless of denomination, to an anti

intellectual, xenophobic, fringe group, which preaches a judgmental Kingdom where you are 'saved' or not.

Jesus answers Pilate, "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 you!"

In Jesus, the world sees a radical paradigm shift, departing from John the Baptist, and those who went before him who declared an imminent coming of a Kingdom whereby God would clean up the world, judging the masses, and saving the faithful – to Jesus, who reigns in a Kingdom which has already begun. Jesus proclaims to the world, "You have been waiting for God, while God has been waiting for YOU!"

This paradigm shift transforms the concept of the coming of the Kingdom, to a place, and to time, where God will not happen to God's people, but God's people will be interactive, participatory, and collaborative with God.

Jesus responds to Pilate, that God's kingdom is not a place where vengeance will triumph, and that God's people are not a people, who will utilize violence to bring about change. For God's Kingdom is not a Kingdom of vengeance; and God's people are not a people of violence, because God himself, is not a God of vengeance, and God himself, is not a God of violence.

"We think of power as when you are able to use verbs in the imperative mood and give orders. Jesus says NO! It is in giving your life, serving the weakest and the most vulnerable, that you discover

true power.”¹ Jesus empowered rather than dominated those around him, because the coming of the Kingdom and the Reign of Christ was to be about empowerment and collaboration – no longer disempowerment and domination.

Our former Dean, Bishop Terry, liked to use the phrase, “This is God’s world, not Caesar’s!” And it is God’s world, as much as we might portray it as Caesar’s sometimes.

Parts of the church have shifted back in their depictions of an authoritarian God; because that is the power they see in the world. Entire continents of wealth, dictate policy and procedure on the world stage, while less fortunate continents in the world strive to feed their hungry, and shelter their people. Power is displayed in the hands of those who dominate.

And thus, it is so much easier to choose to propagate the images of a vengeful God, and proclaim oneself as ‘chosen’ or ‘saved,’ because it absolves oneself of the larger community obligations in God’s Kingdom. Preaching to the masses about personal and individual salvation diverts attention from the suffering of those beyond the walls.

Leaving the problems of the world for God to deal with, and getting oneself at peace with God, are two totally opposing philosophies, which couldn’t be more antithetical to one another.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu says, “God without us, will not – as we without God, cannot.”

¹ God Has A Dream, Archbishop Desmond Tutu

God's Kingdom invites us into collaboration with God. God invites us to carve up our church buildings and use them to feed those who are in need. Our God invites us to reach out across the ocean and partner with people we have never met. Our God calls us to acknowledge the foundation of His Kingdom, and the cornerstone of the Reign of Christ, that humanity is inextricably bound in one another – and that I am, because you are!

Thanks be to God.