

Christ the King  
November 22, 2015  
Trinity Parish Seattle

Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14; Psalm 93; Revelation 1:4b-8; John 18:33-37

There is a lot that a preacher might want to talk about today! In general I subscribe to advice of the great 20<sup>th</sup> century theologian Karl Barth – that a preacher ought to always prepare with the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other. Pretty sure that today he would say your iPad or smart phone. But you get the point – there has to be a connection between what we read in and say about scripture on the one hand, and what we see going on in the world around us. Theology doesn't take place in a vacuum, and not only inside any one of us, but also in the world of shared events and experiences.

And this has been a week in which the world has turned its attention in a concentrated way to the plight of refugees from Syria in light of last week's attacks in Paris. There's quite a debate going on in our country! We have heard wildly different ideas about how we ought to respond to refugees from Syria – everything from "welcome them with open arms" as this country has historically done for the huddled masses yearning to be free, to "stop them all," to "just let in the Christians!"

And here I'll quote one of my other favorite theologians, Stephen Colbert, who this week said,

If you want to know if somebody is Christian, just ask them to complete this sentence: Jesus said "I was hungry, and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty, and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger, and you... \_\_\_\_\_." And if they don't say "welcomed me in," they are either a terrorist or they are running for president.

It seems that for some people, "being Christian" is more about identity politics than it is about how we actually live – whether we actually seek to live as Jesus taught us to live.

There is so much more to say on this issue – and it is such an important one for us as Christians to wrestle with and understand who it is that our faith calls us to be. I hope we can explore this issues together more as these days unfold.

But there are other things happening this week, too. (What is a preacher to do?!) This is also the Sunday before Thanksgiving, a day on which we remember that first feast in Plymouth, Massachusetts, in 1621, that was shared between this country's original inhabitants and a group of, well, uninvited refugees. They were people who had fled religious persecution in Europe, and set out to establish a home where people could practice their religion freely, without passing someone else's religious test. I hope it is a story we'll tell around our Thanksgiving tables this Thursday.

It is appropriate that on this Sunday before Thanksgiving we would celebrate the bounty of this land and the abundance we enjoy in our lives with our Ingathering Sunday. I hope we have all taken stock of our blessings and offered prayers of gratitude for them. And having done so, today we make our pledges of support for God's work in this parish for the coming year.

There's nothing like the scenes of refugees all around the world to sharpen our focus on gratitude for what we have, and our determination to do what we can as a church to spread a little bit of love in this world.

And that, after all is why we're here. It's why Trinity is here. And we are all privileged to play our part as stewards not only of what each one of us has been entrusted with, but of this wonderful place and its ministries – ministries that nourish our lives individually and that extend far beyond these four walls to manifest God's love and make a difference in the world.

But there's even more a preacher might talk about today. This is the last Sunday of the liturgical year, the Sunday we refer to as the Feast of Christ the King. Coming at the end of the liturgical year it symbolizes the culmination of all things and the final reign of Christ when all shall finally be made whole and brought to its fullness under the banner of the Prince of Peace. This kingdom is one of justice and peace, where power is manifest in love and no sword is ever drawn. This image of Christ as King is found in scripture, including the gospel we heard here today. Pilate, in an almost mocking way, asks Jesus if he is a king. His answer will determine his fate. "My kingdom is not from this world," Jesus said. "If my

kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over... But as it is, my kingdom is not from here."

We know right from the beginning of the story that this will be a different kind of king. His birth in a stable, with sages from the east coming to pay homage, were an early hint. From there, he and his family flee to Egypt for safety. They become... refugees.

In the final days of his life we observe in an almost ironic way his "triumphal entry into Jerusalem," with palm branches being waved, only to see him days later being mocked as he is crowned with a crown of thorns. The kingly fate of this manger-born, refugee child turned itinerate healer, preacher, and teacher to a motley crew of disciples seems to have been something of a joke.

But in Christ's resurrection things change. We see one raised from the dead, defeating the powers of death, overcoming his fate at the hands of empire, as if to say once and for all that no power in this world, no empire, no army, no method of torture or weapon of any kind will finally defeat the power of love – self-giving love such as Christ had and has for the world. That is the kind of Sovereign we pledge our allegiance to on this day.

I think there's something special about the symbolism of laying our annual pledges at the foot of this altar on Christ the King Sunday. To me, it is a clear declaration on this particular day of our accepting and giving ourselves to Jesus, who embodies a new model of power, a new kind of kingship based on a love that cares for others as much as we care for ourselves. We heard last week about the transformative power to love, yes, even for one's enemies. Today we're invited to pledge ourselves, body, soul, and spirit, to that kind of transforming love.

I'll leave you today with a quote from another theologian and spiritual writer, a woman named Caryll Houselander who died in 1949, but whose words are strangely timely. She said:

If we are not interested in the minds, the feelings, the hopes, fears, sorrows and joys of everyone with whom we come in contact, we are not interested in Christ. Whatever we do to anyone, we do to him. If we are impatient with the mental suffering, the doubting, the questioning, and the wrestling with the angel of the more sensitive minds, then we are impatient with the mind of

Christ... If we shrink from the broken lives of sinners, then we draw away from Christ fallen and crushed under his cross. If we will not go to the sick and the poor [and, I think she would have said, the refugee] to help them, we will not help Christ.<sup>1</sup>

Next week, we start all over again – the beginning of a new liturgical year – just in case we didn't get it all this time around! But we'll be right back here again next year, reminding ourselves once again, that Christ has offered us a new way of life. And it is a way that gives us life and hope and peace and joy that no kingdom of this world can ever give.

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<sup>1</sup> Caryll Houselander (1901-1949), *The Comforting of Christ* (1947) Quoted in *Mystics, Visionaries & Prophets: A Historical Anthology of Women's Spiritual Writings*, Shawn Madigan, C.S.J., editor