



## Sermon for Last Sunday after Pentecost – Christ the King, Nov. 21, 2021. Do My Actions Look Like Love?

St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Coeur d'Alene

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[Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14, Psalm 93, Revelation 1:4b-8, John 18:33-37](#)

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

- All Hail the Power of Jesus Name, Let Angels Prostrate Fall
- Crown Him with Many Crowns, the Lamb Upon His Throne
- Praise My Soul, the King of Heaven, Praise the Everlasting King

Powerful hymns we sing this Sunday – setting the tone for the awe, wonder, adoration and perhaps a little apprehension we may feel as we celebrate the Feast of Christ the King! Today, we are invited to look to the end of the ages when Jesus Christ will reveal himself fully to all the world, when the Kingdom of God comes to fruition, when all is made whole, and Christ comes to his glory.

Our scriptures today look to that great event with the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven and being given his kingship that shall never be destroyed. This is something we as Episcopalians believe deeply. During our services, we are often praising God, Son and Holy Spirit, proclaiming the infinite nature of God -- the Alpha and the Omega – as it was in the beginning, is now and will be forever. We also pray each Sunday in our Eucharistic prayer that Christ has died, Christ has risen, and Christ will come again.

When I think about Jesus coming in his glory, I picture the scene with amazement, and also with some trepidation and uneasiness. As Daniel says in the verse following our reading today: “As for me, Daniel, my spirit was troubled within me, and the visions of my head terrified me.”

It is hard not to hear of the second coming of Christ, the rapture, the tribulation, the end times, from those in other Christian faith traditions in our area. People who are focused upon the prophecies of Revelation, Ezekiel, Jeremiah, Daniel, and other scriptures in our Bible, living in anticipation that the fulfillment of these prophecies is I-mmi-nent.

And it is close to home for me as well. I can hardly have a conversation with my brother that doesn't include some aspect of a prophecy that has now come to fruition bringing this great event of Christ coming in his glory even closer. When my mother was alive, she and my brother would have long involved conversations about Christian eschatology, which is the study of end-times, what is happening in our world now and how these events are heralding Christ's coming again. And having been raised attending a wide variety of these faith traditions – evangelical, Pentecostal, fundamental, as well as Lutheran, Presbyterian, Methodist, and now Episcopal – I certainly have been indoctrinated in this theology.

There are many rabbit holes one can go down in this study – For example, Premillennialism believes that Christ will come prior to his millennial kingdom, a literal 1,000-year reign of Christ on earth. Postmillennialism proports that Christ will come after a golden age of Christian prosperity and dominance on the earth. Amillennialism teaches there will be no millennial reign of the righteous on earth, and sees the 1,000 years as spiritual, not literal, a very long time. This last belief is held by St. Augustine and most of the reformers of the 16th century. And, these thoughts are developed mostly from just studying Revelation 19 and 20. There is a whole lot more in the Bible.

See, rabbit holes that can take you on many, many paths. Let's instead turn to our Gospel, the discourse between Jesus and Pilate just prior to Jesus' crucifixion.

During this conversation, Jesus calls Pilate on his supposed neutrality by asking if his biases had been given from Jewish leaders or had he come up with this idea of Jesus as King on his own. Pilates comments were not really offered in good faith, but Jesus' responses were. I can imagine that when Jesus proclaims his kingdom is not of this world, there is some relief for Pilate, as there doesn't appear to be a direct threat to either Rome or Judea.

Many believe that in this passage Jesus is talking about his kingdom being heavenly, not of this world. Perhaps there is another way that we can look at this. The values of Jesus' kingdom do not mesh with what people think about a King in this world – what a King should do, be and act like.

The values of Jesus' kingdom are vastly different than what the current system of his day was. He did not have to be on top. He is not oppressive or corrupt, which is what the Romans were to the peoples they subjugated, or what the Babylonians and Persians did to the Israelites during Daniel's time.

These values of Jesus' kingdom are unfolded to us throughout the Gospels. On this feast day, we can pause to reflect upon who Jesus the Christ is in our lives.

Throughout the Gospels, we see Jesus being called the Son of God! The King of Israel! The Messiah, and throughout the Gospels we are shown just what kind of King Jesus is – not one who comes triumphantly on a horse, but on a donkey; not one who is served, but who serves, one who speaks to the lowly and the rejected. Not a king many of us would ever recognize.

Jesus says he has come to testify to the truth. Jesus' physical abuse and brutal death absolutely demonstrate this truth – The power of God's love for each one of us.

Throughout the Gospels, Jesus shows us how we too can live this truth, this love. There is much in the Gospels that point to the end-times. We heard last week about what the end times might look like, when we hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed as this must take place...this is but the beginning of the birth pangs.

And Jesus makes it clear that we can't know the grand plan, or the time when he will come again, or what it will even look like when he does. We've been given glimpses in our scriptures. But even with these portents of what is to come, Jesus tells us to be

prepared. No one knows about that day and hour, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.

In his discourse on what it will be like when the Son of Man comes, he quotes Daniel saying he will come on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory gathering the nations before him.

And in this discussion of talking about how he will separate the nations, he offers a powerful description of how we are to live in love. He invites those on his right to take their inheritance, saying you fed me, gave me clothes, invited me in, took care of me when I was sick, and visited me when I was in prison. When those on his right question these things, he tells them, and I believe he is also telling us, that when you did it for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it to me. What is described here are all acts of love.

And Jesus synthesized all the law and the prophets into these two commandments: Love God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. And love your neighbor as yourself.

The first always seems easier for me than the second, which pred-i-cates at least some level of being able to relate to myself, and then to others, with love, as being made in the image of God. It took me a long, long time to finally come to a place where I understand I am made in the image of God and as such, God loves me unconditionally. I am precious and deserving of receiving that love. As Paul says to the Colossians, "Our life is hidden with Christ in God."

There is a wonderful, thought-provoking Jewish proverb which states, "Before every person there marches an angel proclaiming, 'behold, the image of God.'" This love asks us to relate to ourselves as being made in the image of God, and to relate to our neighbors the same. As Presiding Bishop Michael Curry says in his book, *Love is The Way*: "It's God, up, down and all around, and God is love."

The Feast of Christ the King offers us the opportunity to look at our values and how we operate in society. Are we following Jesus, our servant king? Are we living our lives in service as Jesus showed us over and over? Do we have the faith to believe that when we live in love, we can change the world? We may not see the results of our acts of kindness and love, but we can rest in our faith that when we act in love, Jesus is working through us in ways we may never know.

I pray daily that my actions do, so that I too may be a part of the kingdom of God on earth, living the love of God that our world so desperately needs.

I share with you some additional thoughts from our Presiding Bishop made when talking about how he tries to live into God's love: "My job is to plant seeds of love, and to keep on planting, even – or especially – when bad weather comes. It is folly to think I can know the grand plan, how my small action fits into the larger whole. All I can do – and I am inserting here: all any of can really do – is to check myself again and again: Do my actions look like love?" Amen.