**The Rev. Thomas M. Murphy**

**St. Thomas’ Episcopal Church, Owings Mills MD**

**November 20, 2022**

**Year C, Proper 29: The Last Sunday after Pentecost – Christ the King**

**Jeremiah 23:1-6**

**Canticle 16**

**Colossians 1:11-20**

**Luke 23:33-40**

**Where Christ is King**

Once Jesus was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God was coming, and he answered, “The kingdom of God is not coming with things that can be observed; nor will they say, ‘Look, here it is!’ or ‘There it is!’ For, in fact, the kingdom of God is among you. (Luke 17:20-21)

And, actually, that last line can also be translated, “the kingdom of God is *within* you.”

It seems hard to believe but today is the Last Sunday after Pentecost – the final Sunday of the church year.

Next week, we will turn the page to a new year and begin the holy season of Advent – those quick four Sundays when we prepare for the birth of Jesus, far from home and in the humblest of circumstances.

And during those four quick Advent Sundays, we also look ahead to the end of time, to the day of judgment.

But, first, today, the church offers us an opportunity to reflect on Christ the King.

For many centuries, artists have depicted Christ the King wearing and holding the symbols of an earthly kingship: the golden bejeweled crown, the orb and scepter.

Those symbols were used to honor Jesus, but also to enhance the prestige of the church – the church that, unlike Jesus, very much wanted, and often wielded, worldly power and enjoyed worldly prestige.

But by the 1920s, some church leaders recognized that their worldly power and prestige were fading.

Christians were getting swept up into the ideologies and systems of the world – fascism, communism, nationalism, secularism, materialism, and all the rest.

By the 1920s, many Christians were giving their ultimate allegiance not to Christ the King, or even to the church, but to some truly bad ideas and some really awful leaders.

So, the Church created today’s Feast of Christ the King as a way to push back at these trends, to remind people of where – and in whom – they should place their faith.

You may have noticed that this effort has not worked.

For all sorts of reasons, the church has continued to lose much of its worldly power and prestige.

This can be unnerving for people like me who earn their living from the church.

And, I know it’s sad and disappointing for the many people who miss how the church used to be – packed with people, the place to be, the place to be seen, an influential force in the community.

But, you know, these dramatic changes remind us that Jesus never sought worldly power – quite the opposite.

The Jesus who was born far from home and in the humblest of circumstances wore only one crown: a crown of thorns.

As we heard in today’s gospel lesson, as Jesus was dying on the cross, the leaders and the soldiers mocked him.

What kind of king ends up like this, bloody and humiliated, hanging beside two criminals?

Where is all that power that we’ve heard about? Supposedly you’re able to heal others but you can’t get yourself down from that cross, can you?

Even one of the criminals uses some of his last breaths to express disgust at Jesus

What kind of king – what kind of kingdom – is this?

Jesus said, “The kingdom of God is not coming with things that can be observed; nor will they say, ‘Look, here it is!’ or ‘There it is!’ For, in fact, the kingdom of God is among – *within* - you.”

So, here’s what I think: losing our worldly power and prestige has given us new eyes to see the kingdom of God among us – and new hearts to humbly share the kingdom with people all around us.

A few examples:

Once a month, Sara and I gather here in church with our preschool children and their teachers for Children’s Chapel. Although it’s quite a challenge to hold the attention of 60 or so young children, this time has become one of the highlights of my month.

The whole service is probably shorter than the time it takes to walk the kids over here but I think it’s worth the trip.

We sing some songs. At our most recent service, Wanda played the organ and explained how it works. And, as usual, I gave a very short talk, usually inviting participation from the children.

This past time we talked about Thanksgiving and I invited the children to say who and what we’re thankful for. One of the first kids to pipe up was a little girl who gave thanks for her iPad. That made me worry if we were about to celebrate materialism, but, without any prompting from me or from the teachers, everyone else shouted out answers like “My mommy and daddy!” or “My sister!” or “My friend!”

The Kingdom of God is among – *within* – us.

This is where Christ is king.

Another example.

I’m still dazzled by the courage and generosity of the group of parishioners who have welcomed and cared for Hizbullah and have now offered the same hospitality to Abdul, just 18 years old.

I’m not sure you all know just how generous some of our parishioners have been to these two young men far from home.

There have been countless car rides – some of them over long distances – assistance with Hizbullah’s job search and getting Abdul enrolled in school – navigating all sorts of government bureaucracy – driving lessons - offering fun activities to break the monotony of sitting around the house – invitations to lunch and dinner – the gift of a basketball hoop for Abdul, who loves the game.

And an invitation to Thanksgiving dinner for Hizbullah, Abdul, and the other refugees at Gilead House, who aren’t really our responsibility - well, not officially, anyway.

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Finally, over the past week it has been such a blessing to see so many of you bring in bags filled with food to share with people who might not be able to afford a Thanksgiving meal.

Day by day, the bags have taken over more and more of the Old School Building, where we have our weekday services. I like to think that they’ve been blessed by the prayers said in that room – just as your generosity will be a blessing to so many.

You all know that we distributed a list of items that we hoped would be included in each bag – pretty much the basics.

Here’s the thing, though. I noticed that quite a few of the bags looked awfully full, so I took a peek inside some of them. And, sure enough, so many of you went way beyond our basic list, doubling up on items, adding all sorts of extras and treats – party cups and festive napkins – the things that may seem small to us but really make for a special celebration for people we don’t know and who will never be able to thank us.

And, I know that many of you had to hunt long and hard for canned hams!

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And so, we have reached the end of another church year – and what a year it’s been.

It’s true that the church doesn’t have the worldly power and prestige that it once did.

It’s true that pretty much nobody comes here to be seen or to impress anybody.

But, it’s also true that, without his golden crown, we have a clearer view of Christ the King – we can better see his life of love and sacrifice – and, most of all, the gift of new life that is offered to us all.

And without our worldly power and prestige, we have a clearer view of the Kingdom of God – a kingdom found among grateful children – a kingdom experienced when we extend hospitality to strangers – a kingdom discovered when we give even more than we are asked.

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Amen.