

November 25, 2018 Christ the King Sunday
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Here we are...at the end of the church's year...at the threshold of what is coming next. So much anticipation...

And even though we may be eager and buzzing full of tasks waiting to be done (or perhaps preemptively haggard and overwhelmed)...where we actually stand is a remarkable scene.

Today is Christ the King Sunday. Today, we plant our feet firmly within the reign of God...the throne room of a kingdom nothing like the one in which we live...nor like any of our ancestors have known before us.

Sometimes I like to imagine the church's time and liturgy as a sort of ship...that transport us into a reality beyond what we know. If you are a Dr. Who fan...think of the TARDIS...or maybe the Starship Enterprise...the Bistromath...Dumbledore's pensieve

Or maybe you're not a science fiction fan...in which case it's like...well...ok...I don't really have anything for you. Science fiction is too full of fantastic metaphors...I don't know what the rest of you all might think of...but I imagine there are other things...If you have one you can come teach it to me later...

But whatever kind of transportation the liturgy might be like for you...

Today, it brings us into a throne room, where there is a king...not on a high throne above all who enter...but whose throne is right in the center of the room...with a wash basin beside it...and when his subjects come to kneel before them, he meets them on his own knees and washes their feet...embraces them with no hint of dignity. And there is a long table set around the edges of the room...with every kind of food in the world...that stretches so far in all directions you can't make out the faces at the ends of it...and there is a chair, right there, for you...with the food that comforts you

more than anything in the world beside your place. And when you turn to see who is sitting beside you...well it isn't someone you really expected...or maybe even wanted... to see...and yet somehow you are comforted to know there is a place in the universe where you both belong.

And there is an impossibly tall and wide window at the end of the room...with the doorway out right in the middle of it... that shows a dark almost blue-black expanse beyond...that is quiet...and glowing...and still...but humming...like there is electricity coursing at its edges...building, glowing brighter...but not yet with a clear shape or form. It is what's next...you can tell...

Christ the King Sunday welcomes us into a different kind of kingdom...and prepares us for the expanse of brimming, still, unseen hope that is Advent.

This festival is, I believe, the youngest in the church's calendar...at least of the major festivals we keep. It was instituted by Pope Pius XI in 1925 in the face of rising fascism throughout the world. The Lutheran Church adopted it, I believe, shortly after the Second Vatican Council, which took place in 1959...if you're interested in that sort of thing.

The church has claimed this day to crown the church's year in an act of direct defiance of powers in the world that were hierarchical, oppressive, xenophobic, not to mention anti-Semitic and white supremacist. It is not an indictment of evil rulers way back then...but forces and ideologies that have existed and continue to exist in our lifetimes. If you ever needed a day to see that the church and its story are not like a fairy tale from long ago and far away, then today is it. Today, the church's time is forged within the world we know. The church says that no nation can claim us as subjects above the God...who is the true ruler of the universe...the Ancient of Days...who has more claim to power and loyalty than any puny dictator...and yet who chooses to come close to us in self-giving love and not with military might and commanding force.

We are in a time, again, now, where the tension between our citizenship in God's kingdom and in the kingdoms of this world might come into deeper

tension. (Though maybe every people in every time has been able to say this.) The world isn't as different now as we might wish it was from the days of the early twentieth century when the church saw the need for us to set aside time to be claimed by God's kingdom over and against others.

In the books of Daniel and Revelation we are given cosmic visions of that throne room of Christ the King – a place of glory...where the ethereal...the clouds...surround the One who has come into the world. It is a place where all nations are gathered without borders or boundaries... It is a place where God's rule will be revealed to those who have done both good and evil... Because Truth is simply Truth... and it is True to all and for all people...unchanged and unwavering.

And, as Jesus says to Pilate... “Those who belong to the truth listen to my voice.” And though some of us may want to claim that we don't belong to the truth or are not bound by it. As much as we may prefer our versions of the story...truth is truth...and we are Truth's children.

Sometimes truth is powerful, and beautiful and bright. Sometimes it is frightening. These days we hear truths that are frightening...about the fate of our planet...about suffering that we don't know how to stop...

But we also know that the ultimate, unmoveable truth is the God who reaches out to us in love...who promises us that whatever we do in the name of truth will be worthwhile...though it also may be difficult...and even dangerous. The kingdom of God is not one of promised safety... but it is one of love and life and excitement and unbridled joy. And we are always welcomed...endlessly invited... to come and be a part of it.

And so, I'm going to return to Dr. Who one last time.

The Doctor is a beautiful character...a time traveller from an alien world...powerful and fueled by the desire to bring love and justice to bear in the universe. If you don't know the series, the best way I can describe the doctor is to say...The Doctor is centuries old...and despite being famously

powerful, doesn't use weapons to enact their will...The Doctor has a spaceship that is made from a police call box...like a blue phone booth...but it's bigger on the inside. I always think of the church and the kingdom of God being something that looks small and unimpressive from the outside...but feels so much bigger on the inside...and has room for everyone.

The Doctor, who seems almost impossible to kill is also impossibly fragile...

The Doctor who is not bound by time...is constantly aware of how time enfolds us all and that mortality is real...

She confronts monstrous evils with wit and simple tools and compassion. She can see through the horror of a giant frightening creature... and see where it is suffering. And in death... she can walk unflinchingly toward the most terrifying thing with love and sorrow.

The Doctor gathers travel companions...in ways that echo a gathering of disciples. They are drawn to her... and she to them. In this most recent incarnation of the story...even though she barely knows them, she clearly loves them already...and is delighted when they say they want to join her. Her joy is restrained only by the hesitation that full truth-telling requires. She wants them...but she wants them to choose life with her with their eyes wide open...

There is a dance in joining this kingdom...God wants us to live in it – desperately...and also wants us to choose it. We want to choose it... desperately...because we want to do what matters...but we are also afraid to step beyond our security and concern...

There is a moment of choice for the new friends of the Doctor in a recent episode, where they stand on a threshold...between the world they have known...and the wide-open expanse of the universe with the Doctor...They ask to come with her. And though she wants to them, she warns:

DOCTOR: I can't guarantee that you're going to be safe.

YASMIN: We know.

DOCTOR: Do you? Really? 'Cos when I pull that lever, I'm never quite sure what's going to happen.

RYAN: That's okay.

DOCTOR: You're not going to come back as the same people that left here.

GRAHAM: But that's all right. I think that's good.

DOCTOR: Be sure. All of you, be sure...

And she sees in their eyes that even if they can't fully be sure, they are going to come with her. And so she calls them over to the lever of the ship that causes it to dematerialize and go to its next mission...Instead of pulling the lever herself, she asks: "Do you want to do it together?" And they all place their hands on it together. And just as they are about to push into the next unknown, she says "I love this bit."

We are here again, in this spaceship that is the church, at the threshold of what we know...and the wide expanse of what is possible in a universe where God's reign is brought to bear. And our God so lovingly, eagerly sees us leaning in...and wants nothing more than to pull us close...but also warns us that for as worthwhile as this will be, it will be hard and full of uncertainty and risk. And then, though she could do it herself of course, she invites us all to put our hands with hers on the lever that will push us into the next wide blue-black, unknown, waiting, humming horizon.

And I can imagine God saying, too: "I love this bit."

And into the future we go...

Thanks be to God. Amen.