*Jesus said, “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory.”*  (Mt. 25:31) Christ, our King, rule in our hearts, and bring our attention to you. In the name of God, who creates, redeems and ever walks with us. Amen.

Happy Christ the King Sunday! It would be very appropriate for us to have a party today; after all it’s New Year’s Eve. Well, more accurately, this is the last Sunday of the Church Year, which begins anew in the season of Advent that starts next week. Pope Pius XI first instituted the feast day of Christ the King in 1925 as a response to the rising power of dictatorships in Europe. It was meant as a reminder that there is no true ruler but God in Christ. Pius XI hoped to combat the growing influence of absolute dictators in the secular world.

For weeks and months in our Gospel readings from Matthew, Jesus has presented us with picture after picture of the Kin-dom of God, and now we see Christ on the throne in glory, surrounded by angels, and as it is his prerogative, he is in the seat of judgment. This is the moment for which we pray – your kingdom come, your will be done. Jesus is King of all. And this is the moment of truth.

With all the nations gathered before him, we are told, Christ will, like a shepherd, separate the sheep from the goats. Sheep on the right, goats to the left. Sheep are blessed, and will inherit the kin-dom. Goats are the accursed and are headed for the eternal fire in the company of the devil.

Do we know who we are? Are we sheep or are we goats?

It seems pretty plain to me which group I *want* to identify myself with. I mean….Baa, baa, baa! It’s a no-brainer. But if we look a bit closer, we might notice that neither grouping really has a clue what Jesus is talking about! Sheep and goats alike are caught off guard. “Lord”, they each say, “when was it that we saw you” and did or didn’t care for you, clothe you, feed you, give you something to drink? We don’t remember seeing **you** naked or in prison or sick.

Once again, like bridesmaids and laborers in the field, we are caught unaware. Both sheep and goat have failed to see what is right before their eyes, right there, hiding in plain sight. The King of Everything, the one to rule us all, is everything he has told us that he is, and more, even more. Jesus shows up again; right there in the midst of our lives. He is the person standing next to us, sitting beside us, walking on the street with us, breathing the very same air we breathe.

And if that is not surprise enough, the measure of acceptance in the Kin-dom is not what we expect it to be. There is no test of what we know, or how well we can recite the prayers or quote from scripture, though these holy things inform and teach us, and in many ways draw us close to God and each other. Jesus does not mention dedication to doctrine or time honored tradition, though these things may also enrich our experience of worship in our chosen Christian communities. And, please notice, He does not ask for declarations of belief from sheep or from goat.

For the Son of Humanity, our judgment, the measure of our chosen-ness, is in how we are living as one creature among others in God’s world. Jesus wants to know who we are in relationship with and how that relationship is expressed in our lives? Who are we paying attention to? As we go about rushing from here to there in our everyday living, do we see who is right in front of us?

One of my favorite spiritual music groups is a duo, Anna Hernandez and Deborah Griffin Bly, who recorded on and off in the 1990’s and 2000’s as *The Miserable Offenders*. This lyric is from their song, *Where You Are*,

*Learn what you must learn,*

*Go where you must go;*

*When you stop running, stand still, listen,*

*You will know that you can find God where you are*

*Hiding in plain sight.*

The Kin-dom of God is a both/and place in so many ways. It is *both* here *and* not yet, hiding in plain sight. Jesus is the *great both/and* who sits *both* with God in glory *and* who appears to us always in the needs of those around us. JW Pepper writes, “*Christ the King Sunday serves as a reminder that Jesus humbled himself to become human for the salvation of mankind around the world. With that in mind, it is fitting for all those who believe in the model of Christ as Lord and Savior to recommit ourselves to a life of humility and service to those in need.*

Jesus is not the typical king or symbol of earthly power. He has shown us that over and over. In Mark chapter 10, Jesus says, *“You know that those who are recognized as rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones make their authority over them felt. But it shall not be so among you. Rather, whoever wishes to become great among you will be your servant; whoever wishes to be first among you will be the slave of all. For the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”* That, in many ways, is the spirit in which we should view the Feast of Christ the King.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

There is a story about two brothers who shared a field and a mill. Each day they divided evenly the grain they ground together that day. Now as it happened, one of the brothers lived alone and the other had a family. One day the brother who lived alone thought to himself, “It isn’t fair that we divide the grain evenly each day when I have only myself to provide for.” So each night he would take some of his grain and deposit it in his brother’s barn. Well, it just so happened that the brother with a family thought to himself, “it is not fair that my brother in his old age will not have family to provide for him.” And each night he brought a measure of grain to his brother’s barn. Each morning the brothers found that their supply had been mysteriously restored to it’s original level.

One night as they traveled to the other’s home with their grain, they ran into each other at the halfway point. They suddenly realized what had been happening and they embraced each other in love. The story is that God witnessed this holy exchange and declared that meeting place a holy dwelling saying, “this holy place where God is made known, is my temple, the place where humans discover each other in love.” [[2]](#footnote-2)

It occurs to me that the reality of *our both/and* is that we are *both* sheep *and* goats. God wants to save us all, to touch our hearts with love, remind us that we are made from love, and bring us to that holy place of meeting Christ in our neighbor.

At this end of our Church year, Christ the King Sunday, perhaps we may take this chance to look back on the past year, as Paul writes to the Ephesians, “*with* *the eyes of our hearts enlightened”,* and recall when and where the power of Christ entered into our lives.

Paul’s prayer for the community and for us is *“that we may know what is the hope to which Christ calls us”*. What if now is the right time for New Year’s resolutions? Why wait till January? In this coming year, how might we live as if God’s reign in our lives really mattered? Now those would be some powerful resolutions!

Jesus does not say we need to be perfectly ready, perfect in prayer and practice to be citizens of the Kin-dom. What if we simply tried a bit harder to pay attention to where Jesus appears around us? Pastor David Lose wonders whether we might be willing to take a moment to consider whether God is present among those we disregard or despise? Might God still be surprising us by showing up just where we least expect it? It is no doubt that God’s love is inclusive and expansive beyond our imagination.

Might our call on this Christ the King Sunday be to imagine that God’s reign of judgment defined and reshaped by mercy includes those we are so sure are just plain wrong?

Now, wouldn’t that be a different start to our new year, to begin with wondering how we might be present, paying attention this Advent to the possibility and reality of God’s indwelling in each person we meet?

I wonder…….

To quote once again from the Miserable Offenders:

This is it, more or less  
And who would ever guess  
This is the best of times  
This is the worst of times  
And it's passing  
Pay attention.

1. <http://blogs.jwpepper.com/index.php/the-celebration-of-christ-the-king-sunday/> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Kurtz and Ketcham, The Spirituality of Imperfection, 3rd ed. Bantam Books, 1992. 9-10. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)