

Together, in a few minutes, we will say The Lord's Prayer:

"Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven."

And we wonder, what does God's kingdom look like?

Today, on Christ the King Sunday, our Gospel reading contains the final words of Jesus' public ministry. Jesus speaks plainly to his followers, repeating the message several times.

*There are people who need help, and we must tend to them. There are hungry people, people without clothing, sick people, and people in jail.*

Jesus also speaks to us, Christians living out The Word in 2023. What, then, are we to do?

During the green ordinary Sundays of Pentecost, we have heard the teachings of Jesus. We have joined His disciples in towns and cities, on hillsides, and along the banks of the Sea of Galilee. If we have listened carefully, we have learned that what Jesus says at the end is what he said at the beginning:

"Love God. Love Your Neighbor."

Here, in Matthew, He emphasizes one final time who our neighbors are:

"Just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me."

The Gospels inspire us, especially passages such as the beautiful Sermon on the Mount. Jesus amazes us: healing the sick, raising the

dead back to life, reaching out to strangers and those outside the limits of respectability.

Then and now, the followers of Jesus long to live in the kingdom of a leader we admire so much. We joined the angels in praise as we sang our opening hymn, "Crown Him with Many Crowns." But we're not generally people who are comfortable with monarchies, golden thrones, and gem-encrusted crowns. We live in a democracy. How do we look at Jesus Christ as our king?

Christ the King Sunday originated in 1925, after the first World War, when Pope Pius XI saw a need to rally Christians against atheism, communism, and secularism in the world. Many Episcopal churches have adopted this holy day.

Here at St. Thomas's we have a beautiful crucifix above the high altar, a "Christus Rex," Christ the King on a cross. Thanks to our parish administrator, Julie Kelly, I learned that it replaced a plain bronze cross in 1952 as a memorial gift in honor of Dr. Lewis Thorne who died in 1950 and Jane E. Williams, who died in 1884. Dr. Thorne's widow and the Ushers Guild presented this treasure to our parish. I have loved this image since I first came to St. Thomas's about eight years ago. But only in preparing this sermon have I thought about the complexities of Christ as king.

Personally, I am more likely to choose "The King of Love My Shepherd Is," and I asked Matt to include that hymn in our service.

I read the Gospel closely and thought about what Jesus, the heavenly king, asks of us. In the time when he spoke the words, Jesus was entering into Holy Week, toward His betrayal, His arrest and torture, His death on the cross, His Resurrection. He was preparing His people

for the time when they would have to continue His work without their shepherd.

We hear these words as we anticipate Advent, our time of preparation before the humble birth of an infant in Bethlehem. What are we to do with the message?

How we serve “the least of these”? At St. Thomas’s we collect clothing for Loaves and Fishes. We donate through our web page, or directly, to Episcopal Relief and Development, to IRIS, and to the many organizations that improve conditions for people all over the world who suffer the effects of poverty and deprivation.

Surely, we are the sheep, sitting at the right hand of God. Are we doing enough? The world is so much more complex than it was in the first century. We are often quite separate from the poor and the hungry and the imprisoned. How can we touch them, the needy?

Should we not go further, and examine the systemic roots of poverty and injustice?

Jesus pointed us in that direction, in the Gospel of Matthew, Book 23, Verse 23: “Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe the mint, dill, and cumin and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith.”

First, it is important to learn about the structural inequities that have brought us to a time when so many people face injustice. We must search the origins of our laws and our practices, the basic foundations of our culture. Then, having learned the history and accepted the responsibility that this knowledge lays upon us, we can move into action in ways that the Apostles could not have imagined. We can support our friends and neighbors – and so many individuals in our

parish -- who work for the rights of tenants, for fairness in the legal system, for prison reform, for improved health and education services, for the rights of those who are attacked because of their identities, and for those who look to the United States as a safe refuge. We listen to the words of the prophet Isaiah (1:17): "Learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression."

As a parish, we can take on this work. None of us alone has the skills, or the money, or the energy to accomplish these goals, but we are all able to contribute in some way. Let it be our Advent commitment, that we will educate ourselves and find avenues by which we can improve conditions for those who suffer.

There is a stack of books on a table just to your left as you enter the Lounge, where we hope you will all gather for coffee hour. Browse the collection, which has been put together by parishioners, and choose a book to read during Advent. I can suggest The New Jim Crow or The Warmth of Other Suns, or a book I just finished, Killers of the Flower Moon. Learn and share – and then, in January, let us recommit to our ideals.

A guiding passage for St. Thomas's is found in Micah 6:8, "What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" Having done so, we will greet the Messiah, the baby in the manger, with hearts full of the love Jesus asks of us, the love that is action, that is without judgment, that is shared with every one of God's children.