

**Christ the King Sunday -- November 26, 2017**

**Scripture Focus: Matthew 25:31-46**

**All lectionary readings:** [http://www.lectionarypage.net/YearA\\_RCL/Pentecost/AProp29\\_RCL.html](http://www.lectionarypage.net/YearA_RCL/Pentecost/AProp29_RCL.html)

It's Christ the King Sunday! Aren't you happy? This day signifies the end of the "church year." Beautiful nerds - and you know who you are - you already know that Advent 1 (December 3) is when the new church year begins. We have three years of readings - years A, B and C. This Sunday, Christ the King Sunday, is the end of year "A" and next Sunday, Advent 1, is the beginning of year "B".

### **How did we get Christ the King?**

It is one of the newest days of the church year and was added in 1925 by the Roman Catholic Church. They thought the world was going to hell in a secular, revolutionary handbasket in the nineteen teens and twenties, and they, the Roman Church, needed to inject some old school authority back into the lives of the faithful in the midst of social upheaval.

A real world catalyst for Christ the King day was the Mexican Revolution. With the 1917 Mexican revolution taking root and institutionalizing, the Mexican Roman Catholic faithful chafed at the government thinking revolution was the ultimate answer. The Church in Mexico remained defiant, proclaiming "Cristo Rey!" "Christ is King!"

Taking the Mexican church's religious lead, the Pope declared that Catholics would celebrate, "Christ, The King of the Universe." He was aiming not just at Mexico, but all the countries caught up in the revolutionary fervor that had gripped people around the world from 1917-1923 (communist and non-communist revolutions).

After Vatican II (decades later), Rome formally moved the Christ the King Sunday observance from its 1925 place in the church year to the end of November where it is today. This did not matter for most protestant churches, because they did not follow a lectionary based church. But Episcopalians have always followed some kind of cycle of readings.

Because of the adoption of the revised common lectionary (RCL - 3 year series of readings), more denominations are trying on Christ the King Sunday. *Nerds* - when did Episcopalians formally adopt the RCL? It is *much* more recent than you would think. The Episcopal Church only formally adopted the RCL in 2006 (today it's what 95% of Episcopalian churches use). Because of RCL, even some Baptists have jumped on the King wagon. Take comfort, we were lectionary before lectionary was cool.

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### **Matthew 25 today - if possible, let's unhook it from Christ the King**

Is it a parable of judgement or a great call to social action? For Matthew, maybe neither and both. How is that for a muddled Episcopalian answer?

### **It is a Judgement of the unrighteous?**

In the bible, Jesus is **not** asking us to remove our allegiance from a president, king, emperor or Caesar and translate it to Jesus as a new Caesar. He wants to be *more* than a King - he wants all of us and not just our loyalty. He doesn't look at all like a King in Matthew. When you read the gospel story today, he embodies human need. He is trusting us to respond to (or not) to the great needs of his people. The need is urgent. We are blessed or cursed depending on how we respond. And he uses sheep and goats, prisoners and the sick to make his point.

That is pretty off putting for most, especially the sheep and goats part. Some of us go straight to hell... as the punchline. But, context is King, pun intended. Ask yourself, where are we in Matthew? Today is Chapter 25. Chapter 26 is the last supper and betrayal. Matthew 27 is the trial and death of Jesus. Matthew 28 is the Resurrection and Great Commission. In Chapter 25, Jesus is facing down humiliation and death, and he is asking his followers to really care for each other as they enter this dark time together.

### **OR, it is a Mission statement for soup kitchens across the country?**

Matthew 25 is quoted voluminously by social action agencies - tend the sick, prisoner, orphan, widow, etc. But more than that, Jesus wants us to see the world with new eyes. With these eyes, serving others is not some sort of self-conscious outreach, but a reflexive care. We are not to worry if we are good little boy and girl servants, we help and care because it is part of our DNA in Christ. When we know that we are loved by God, we are going to share that love and care at the right time.

### **My struggle**

I don't think we have to figure every nuance of Matthew 25, but I am having a hard time articulating exactly what to take home. So, I am going to have to punt and ask the Holy Spirit to speak to you and to me. Pray for the Holy Spirit to transform us and give us a fresh sense of how Jesus is more than King and more than a servant. May God reshape us, bless us, and equip us to care for others. God is the one that we live and move and have our being. Christ is better than a King.

Peace, Todd