

“God’s King: Our Savior”
Pentecost 26, Proper 28C – November 21, 2010
Jeremiah 23:1-6; Canticle 16;
Colossians 1:11-20; Luke 23:33-43.

Introduction:

Today is the last Sunday of this church year. Next Sunday is the first Sunday of Advent, and the beginning of a new Church Year.

We end the church year by celebrating “Christ The King Sunday”, then we begin a new year by preparing for the birth of Jesus, the Messiah, and His eventual return to earth as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Today is also the Sunday before Thanksgiving so we are especially mindful of all we have to give thanks for as Christian Americans.

Let’s talk a little bit about

The Issue of Kingly Sovereignty:

In the past Kings were often referred to as “sovereigns”; that is people who possessed absolute power and control over their subjects, who could rule them as they saw fit. They were in a position of complete control. Rare was the King who was not corrupted by all that power. That was one of the constant issues God had his prophets addressing with Israel’s Kings.

We see examples of the corrupting influence of

power when we look at our Congress. Charlie Rangle being convicted of eleven counts of ethics violations is only the latest illustration. Other examples might be Congress voting itself a pay increase when people on Social Security receive none; or Congress creating for itself a retirement and medical insurance package that is not attainable for anyone else in the country shows how corrupting a sense of sovereign power can be.

When this American colony won its independence from Great Britain and was debating what form of government to institute there was a strong push by some to retain the position of King – and specifically to make George Washington the first King of the new nation, The United States of America.

At that time in history there was no nation on earth that wasn't ruled by an individual who exercised sovereign power – whether the title was King, or Monarch, or supreme Warlord, or commanding General of the Army and Supreme Ruler of the Nation, or Dictator for Life. There was no democratic form of government in existence at that time that didn't also include a supreme ruler. Thankfully, we settled on a President instead of a King.

The practice of having a supreme monarch, or King as ruler of a nation was not God's first choice on how

the nations of the earth should govern themselves. God Himself intended to be the King, and rule directly through His Word, His Holy Spirit, and His chosen spokespersons. God knew He was not going to be corrupted by human power and sin. However, because of willfulness, that is sin, humans chose to place themselves under the authority of other humans rather than to trust in God's rule.

Listen to this excerpt of the tension that was developing between God and His people. From 1 Samuel 10:17-19, we read: *¹⁷Samuel summoned the people to the LORD at Mizpah ¹⁸and said to them, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'I brought up Israel out of Egypt, and I rescued you from the hand of the Egyptians and from the hand of all the kingdoms that were oppressing you.'¹⁹But today you have rejected your God, who saves you from all your calamities and your distresses; and you have said, 'No! but set a king over us.' Now therefore present yourselves before the LORD by your tribes and by your clans."*

One of the reasons God didn't want there to be Kings has to do with the very nature of Kingship. A King was a supreme ruler, holding the power of life or death; the power to build up or to tear down. Kings were like

God, but without the moral fiber that would prevent them from becoming corrupted because of their sovereign power. God, knowing the frailty of the human soul, knew only He, the Lord God Almighty, was properly fit for sovereign rule.

Thus we read these words from Deuteronomy 17:14-20: *¹⁴When you have come into the land that the LORD your God is giving you, and have taken possession of it and settled in it, and you say, "I will set a king over me, like all the nations that are around me," ¹⁵you may indeed set over you a king whom the LORD your God will choose. One of your own community you may set as king over you; you are not permitted to put a foreigner over you, who is not of your own community. ¹⁶Even so, he must not acquire many horses for himself, or return the people to Egypt in order to acquire more horses, since the LORD has said to you, "You must never return that way again." ¹⁷And he must not acquire many wives for himself, or else his heart will turn away; also silver and gold he must not acquire in great quantity for himself. ¹⁸When he has taken the throne of his kingdom, he shall have a copy of this law written for him in the presence of the levitical priests. ¹⁹It shall remain with him and he shall read in it all the days of his life, so that he may learn to fear the LORD*

his God, diligently observing all the words of this law and these statutes, ²⁰neither exalting himself above other members of the community nor turning aside from the commandment, either to the right or to the left, so that he and his descendants may reign long over his kingdom in Israel.

Kings thus became the prototype for earthly government. Today, though, we are so far removed from the practice of a sovereign human ruling over us that we have difficulty understanding how powerful they once were. Today, in too many nations, kings have been replaced with despotic dictators. Dictators, we understand. Kings, we don't get.

Yet, today is "Christ The King Sunday" precisely to recognize that

There Is Still One Who Exercises Sovereign Rule Over Us,

And this is by the very design of Almighty God. What Israel rejected God fulfilled in and through His Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus is the fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy that God would raise up from David's lineage, a "*righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land.*" And, His name will be "the Lord our righteousness". Luke's gospel as we read it

in Canticle 16, declares that God's King will set us free from the hands of our enemies, free to worship God without fear.

To the church at Colosse, St. Paul wrote that this King – Jesus Christ – *is the very image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation ... For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in Jesus, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.* And through a sovereign act of God the sign placed above Jesus' head on Calvary's Cross read – in three languages – *this is the King of the Jews.* And, because He is a King, Jesus can exercise sovereign power like he did to the thief on the cross next to him: *today you will be with me in paradise.*

So, I ask you this morning

To Whom, or What, Do You Bow Your Knee?

The truth is, all of us bow our knee to someone or something, some time in our lives. It might be a parent, a spouse, a boss, a philosophy, a religious practice, material possessions, certain knowledge, or our own pride. All of us have someone, or something we bow to when crunch time comes and we have to make a choice what to believe in or obey. Never in history has there

been a King, or a system, or a philosophy, who was absolutely, totally, worthy of having sovereign power over others humans. Yet, like Israel, we want a king to rule over us.

God has given us our King. His name is Jesus Christ. In the Christian faith we honor Jesus with the titles Lord and Savior. Not only is Jesus our King, the Lord of our lives, He is also our Savior. He knows the way to Heaven and if we follow His path He'll see that we get there. Today, on Christ the King Sunday, we are also **Making Our Stewardship Commitments.**

Today, we are laying these symbols of our lives on the altar of sacrifice. We're saying, *"Lord Jesus, this is what we believe you, as our Lord, are leading us to commit with our Time, our Talent, and our Treasure. We want to help you reconcile people to our Heavenly Father. Thank you for the privilege of being able to work alongside you in the drama of salvation. Make our lives count Lord. We love you and thank you."*

We'll gather our commitments in this basket on the Communion Table and offer them to God. Through offering them to God, we are offering ourselves to service in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.