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Holy Comforter

Richmond, VA

**November 22, 2015; The Last Sunday after Pentecost, Christ the King
Sunday, and ONE Sunday**

Readings: 2 Samuel 23:1-7, Psalm 132:1-13; Revelation 1:4b-8; John 18:33-37

Not Of This World

On this last Sunday after Pentecost, we overhear Pilate questioning
Jesus.

Jesus is the prisoner facing death, and yet he seems to be in control of
the scene.

Jesus is in control in the sense of being at peace and being grounded in
the larger reality than his immediate circumstance.

Pilate is the one who has no idea what is happening; he doesn't know who
Jesus is; he doesn't know why people want him dead so badly; he
doesn't know the bigger picture.

Looking at this scene, with our perspective of knowing the full story of who
Jesus is and what was being accomplished for God and all
humanity...we see it as a piece of God's larger reality...and this
can help us in the present...

...to realize that God's larger reality is at work in all the scenes of our
lives...and perhaps we can know the peace of Jesus, the focus of
Jesus, even when the immediate circumstance may seem far
from God or we feel far from God.

For God is never far; but is right here with us now; calling us to be about
the work of the kingdom...the work of God's reign.

Pilate is caught up in the politics of the day, and using that framework to
define all that he sees, he asks Jesus: "Are you the King of the
Jews?"

Why are you asking me this, Jesus responds.

What have you done? Pilate wants to know.

To which Jesus responds: "My kingdom is not from this world.

If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews (read, corrupt religious officials, rather than the Jewish population).

But as it is, my kingdom is not from here."

These words are good ones for us to consider often, in relationship to who Jesus is for us/who God is for us, and what we are to about as followers of the Way of Jesus.

"My kingdom is not from this world."

Yes, Jesus is King, but this world did not crown Jesus.

The world has not yet crowned Jesus...but we who follow Jesus and look to him for understanding about God, we look at him and see God.

We crown Jesus every time we seek first the kingdom of God, and God's righteousness, as the hymn goes...every time we are able to step outside of the circumstances that define us -- because of where we live, when we live, how we live -- and work to make God's reign visible in the world today.

But it is not of the world, as we hear in John's Gospel...what we seek we will find here only when we make it visible....only when faithful followers of God make it visible...only when people of goodwill act.

How wonderful that others make God's reign visible for us...when we see peace...when we see efforts to end poverty...when we see justice for all...when we see people healed in body, mind, and spirit. God works through us, and God works through others, who may not even view themselves as religious.

I love that we observe ONE Sunday on the same Sunday as Christ the King Sunday...or the Reign of God Sunday...because the UN

Millennium Development Goals are not of this world but come from an awareness of what the world should be, which, as we see it, comes from God.

The United Nations Millennium development goals are:

1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
2. Achieve universal primary education
3. Promote gender equality and empower women
4. Reduce child mortality
5. Improve maternal health
6. Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
7. Ensure environmental sustainability
8. Develop a global partnership for development

Originally, all the United Nations Member States pledged to achieve these goals by this year, 2015.

Much has been done to achieve the goals but much remains to be done, and the UN is committed to continuing these efforts that have made a huge difference in many lives.¹

In 2006, the Episcopal Church, through General Convention, voted to have a ONE Sunday about this time of year to support the UN Millennium Development Goals.

ONE is a grassroots advocacy campaign backed by more than two million in the US, and ONE Episcopalian is a partnership between the Episcopal Church and ONE.

The idea being that ONE person can make a big difference, and each person we help makes a big difference.

The idea that each one of us can make a big difference, is an idea that we at Holy Comforter talk about all the time...a belief that we know to be

¹ On the Episcopal Church's website, these goals are found under the heading: Eight Steps Toward Healing a Hurting World. <http://www.episcopalchurch.org/page/millennium-development-goals>

true...even when we might not all agree certain theological matters or the finer points of the Nicene Creed, we can agree that each one of us can make a difference...because each one of us has been created in the image of God and given gifts to make this world a better place...to make God's reign known.

Today we are invited to make the world a little bit better for those who need our help.

This is one of the many reasons why it is good to belong to a church community by the way...because as a church we can organize in such a way so as to help each of us contribute.

We voted to make our offering in support of the Millennium Development Goals to Heifer International this year.

Every year on this Sunday we make an offering to an organization that supports the goals; you may remember last year we gave to the Malala Fund.

We received some criticism for doing that last year, in response to my talking about it on Facebook...some people thought it was wrong to give to a cause that primarily helps girls who are Muslim get an education.

I mention this today because what we will give to Heifer international will help the people who need to be helped with no regard to their religion, thanks be to God.

Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world."

Isn't it only in the world that we have religions, anyway?

Working to break down the walls that divide humanity be that about religion or anything else...is helping to make God's reign known on earth.

Of course, this is on my mind because of the recent statements from some politicians saying we should take only Christian refugees from Syria...that sort of thinking is so wrong on so many levels...what can one say.

Let's think about happier things for a moment, and something that we can

effect today right now...our offering to Heifer International. For as they say on their website, Heifer International, "Together we have power over hunger and poverty."²

If you go to the Heifer website, you can see all the animals that you can give, such as a goat for \$120, or a sheep for \$120, or honey bees for \$30 or actual heifer for \$500.

One can also contribute to an animal if one cannot buy a whole animal to donate.

How many animals will we be able to give from what we offer today?

The gift of animals helps people to help themselves in so many ways.

As Heifer states: "Giving an animal is like giving someone a small business, providing wool, milk, eggs and more.

Animal donations can provide families a hand up, increasing access to medicine, school, food and a sustainable livelihood."³

Donations go around the world to the poorest people.

This is a ministry that some of you who have been at HoCo for awhile know much about...for this church once gave an Ark, and raised \$5,000 or what it was at that time, to do so!

An Ark includes two water buffalos, two cows, two sheep and two goats, along with bees, chicks, rabbits and more.

After church today, I recommend that you go to www.heifer.org to see the animals we will be able to give and the smiling faces of people who have hope because of Heifer International and because of our offering today.

We follow the Way of Jesus because we have come to find that Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, for us and for our world.

² <http://www.heifer.org/>

³ <http://www.heifer.org/gift-catalog/animals-nutrition/index.html>

Being a Christian opens us to the needs of the world, to the goodness of all religions, to our brothers and sisters around the corner and around the world.

Jesus changed the meaning of “King;” he had to use that word because there was no good way to explain God’s reign to people who had never seen it...and we still don’t fully understand because we have yet to see it in its fullness...but we have come here today to be united with God through Christ (to be reminded that we are already united) so that we may be about the work of God’s kingdom.

Being a Christian puts us in the room with Pilate but we see beyond the room where Pilate seems to hold all the power, and we catch the vision of Jesus, of the bigger reality, of God at work in the world. Amen.