

The Rev. Dr. Hilary B. Smith

Holy Comforter

Richmond, VA

November 20, 2016; The Last Sunday after Pentecost; Christ the King Sunday/Reign of Christ Sunday; ONE Sunday

Readings: Jeremiah 23:1-6; Canticle 16; Colossians 1:11-20; Luke 23:33-43.

The Lord is Our Righteousness

Today we celebrate Christ the King Sunday or the Reign of Christ Sunday...this last Sunday after Pentecost, right on the cusp of Advent.

We are about to begin again, the story of Jesus coming into the world...but on this day, we are invited to take all of the past liturgical year and proclaim our faith.

Everything that we know about Jesus, his life, his message, and what happened after he was crucified, all of it leads us to proclaim that Christ is our King.

Using that word, "King," for the One who served, for the One who gave everything for his friends, for you and for me, ...well, Jesus gives a new meaning to being a King, and the reign of Christ looks nothing like the rule of the men of Christ's time.

And we know that even the best of our leaders, are not God.

The sort of King the sort of leader that Jesus came to be...and inspires us to be...is the leader described by the prophet Jeremiah.

Jeremiah speaks of a situation that we can understand...the people are not united...physically scattered in their case.

This disunity, Jeremiah says, is has been caused by poor leadership...the situation is so bad, the prophet says that God will have to bring the people together, and that God will raise up a leader to

shepherd the people, to care for the
people, to unify the people.

“The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will
raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall
reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute
justice and righteousness in the land.
In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety.
And this is the name by which he will be called:
‘The Lord is our righteousness’.”

As Christians, we hear the words of Jeremiah and we think about Jesus...the One who brings safety, the one who brings people together...the earthly rulers are not able to be the shepherds that the people need, so God will provide a righteous King.

As one commentator notes, “Looking back through Jeremiah, we are able to see his expectations for a righteous king....This king does not exhibit the behaviors of a grand military ruler, but models ultimate leadership by being present with the people, all the people. This king reached out beyond the margin with a model of radical inclusivity.”¹

On this Christ the King Sunday, as we do everyday, we seek to model our lives on the
One who came to serve.

We do this --- we follow the way of Jesus, we seek peace,
justice...with love in our hearts...love that God has
poured into our hearts by the grace given to us.

We are displaying signs outside the church, which have
our logo, our website, and a large safety pin.

Following the election of Donald Trump to be our next president,
many in our nation are afraid...we hope for the
best...we support the president of our country...but
based on what was said during the campaign and what has
happened since -

many in minority categories are concerned, worried, afraid.

The safety pin means that this is a place where Muslims,
people of color, refugees, immigrants with or without
papers, LGBTQ people and all can find a

¹ David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, eds., *Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary, Feasting on the Word, Year C, Vol., 3*, Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010, Epub., Mary Eleanor Johns, “Pastoral Perspective,” Loc 11836 of 12899.

welcome...can find safety and support...we
back up that safety pin with our action in
the world.

Like most things, the safety pin is becoming controversial,
even among those who believe what the pin
represents.²

People are saying that it is easy to wear a pin but harder to
act, or that anyone can wear a pin and they might not
be safe.

I think is a good symbol; and as to whether the one wearing
it is safe or not, once they look into our eyes and see
the love of God looking back, people will know
who is safe and who is not.

Our church is a safe place and a beacon of light in the
world as we seek to align our thoughts, words, deeds
with those of Christ the King.

God is still God.

We are still who we are.

As I mentioned in my message, the day after the election, I
have never been more certain of who I am for God and
who we are as this community of faith.

We are called to walk in love, following the Way of Jesus,
in every circumstance.

The way of Jesus, the way of God, Jeremiah's message, is
about unity...about finding our way in this world in
solidarity with all God's children.

As the Church, we are called to be a place of peace...a
place of reconciliation, of healing.

On November 18th, every year, we celebrate St. Hilda of
Whitby.

She is a perfect saint for us at this time even though she
lived in the 600s.

She was the abbess of a community of monks and nuns....men and women in the same
Abby with Hilda as their leader.

² <http://www.episcopalcafe.com/safety-pins-and-solidarity/>

Hilda created a space that welcomed those who had heated disagreements about the faith...those who supported Roman practices and those who supported Celtic practices.

The famed Synod of Whitby decided for the Roman date for Easter; not what everyone wanted; but Hilda's influence helped the Church to move forward in peace.

We are called to be people and a community that seeks peace and reconciliation.

How will God invite us to this important work for our nation?

Seeking peace and reconciliation does not, however, mean shying away from proclaiming the Good News of God in Christ...the reign of Christ...and showing forth through our lives what that can be.

This will put us in conflict with some, and that's just the way it is.

On this Christ the King Sunday, our Gospel reading is of the crucifixion of the Jesus.

Not everyone likes the message of Jesus, then or now, for Jesus calls us to live out of our abundance and not our fear.

We are doing that today with our observance of ONE Sunday.

Since 2007, Holy Comforter has been a ONE Episcopal Church, setting aside one Sunday a year to focus on the United Nations Millennium Development Goals, in 2015, as the millennium has come and gone, the program is now called the Sustainable Development Goals.

The goals are basically the same -- to end poverty and hunger, to treat disease, HIV, support women...

Today we are focusing on the goal to prevent and treat disease by raising money for Doctors Without Borders.

In our world that often wants to build walls, Doctors Without Borders does not see borders but people.

Since their founding in 1971, they have treated over 100 million patients. They say, "It's simple really: go where the patients are. It seems obvious but at the time it was a revolutionary concept because the borders got in the way." They are committed to remaining neutral and impartial as they go to some of the most conflicted places/situations to help this in desperate need. Just yesterday, Doctors Without Borders issues a press release about the bombing of hospitals in Syria since bombing resumed on Nov. 15th. *MSF has been supporting eight hospitals in east Aleppo with medical supplies since 2014. MSF also runs six medical facilities across northern Syria and supports more than 150 hospitals and health centers across the country, many of them in besieged areas. Despite its best efforts, there are many areas – including west Aleppo – where MSF is currently unable to work, but it continues to try to provide humanitarian and medical aid in these areas.*³ Even the Children's hospital in Aleppo has been destroyed by the bombing. What we give to Doctors Without Borders will help people who are in desperate need.

You know that God cries for what is happening in Syria and all place where people suffer.
Good Fridays come in many forms.

Jesus suffered and died to be with us in all our Good Fridays...to be there with the people of Syria...to be here with those who suffer, are lonely, or lost, or afraid.

Jesus' Kingship was not known by its worldly power or by force, but rather by what he was willing to give, for us, for our world.

It can be hard to see, this kingdom of Christ, some days.

We might be like that thief who asked Jesus to be remembered in his kingdom.

What made it possible for that man to see beyond the moment or see the moment differently?

"Surveying the scene at 'the place that is called the Skull', we find not the slightest shred of evidence that such a kingdom exists, ever has existed, or ever will exist.

³ <http://www.doctorswithoutborders.org/article/syria-multiple-hospitals-hit-over-past-48-hours> MSF are the initials for Doctors Without Borders taken from the French *Médecins Sans Frontières*

The thief asks nonetheless.

Somehow he has found the...lens that permits him to
recognize salvation that intrudes into the absolutely
hopeless moment where no one is saved from
suffering and death, which is also exactly the
moment when salvation breaks through.⁴

In our darkest moments, salvation breaks through.

We feel it in our hearts...God's presence, God's love, which guides us, which makes us
long for the reign of Christ, which helps us to live into that reality now through our
thoughts, words, and deeds.

Let us pray,

God of all creation we pray this day for the reign of Jesus the Christ. We pray that in the
midst of chaos we might hear Jesus' word to us; that in the midst of heartache we might
know Jesus' presence, and in the midst of a cacophony of voices we might proclaim:
The Lord is our righteousness. Amen.⁵

⁴ David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, eds., *Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary, Feasting on the Word, Year C, Vol. 3*, Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010, Epub., Patrick J. Wilson, "Homiletical Perspective," Loc 12597 of 12899.

⁵ Prayer taken from Kimberly Bracken Long, editor, *Feasting on the Word, Worship Companion: Liturgies for Year C, Vol. 2, Trinity Sunday Through the Reign of Christ*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013, Loc. 6362 of 6773.