



BIBLE STUDIES THAT WORK

Christ the King Sunday (A) **November 29, 2020**

RCL: Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24; Psalm 100; Ephesians 1:15-23; Matthew 25:31-46

The texts for Christ the King Sunday in Year A mince no words: from the beginning of the Ezekiel text to the end of the Matthew text, they work together to tell the story of what kind of reign we can expect from Christ. On a Sunday like this one, some questions may be helpful to explore around the whole concept of Christ as king:

- What strengths and challenges come up when you imagine Christ as a king or God as a ruler? How does this image resonate or not resonate with you, from where you are located in the 21st century?
- How might Christ's life, death, and resurrection rule us differently than human governments and rulers?

Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24

In Ezekiel, we are given a less familiar text about a more familiar image: God as the shepherd of the sheep. Writing from Babylon, Ezekiel has experienced the fall of Judah and deportation to Babylon. Ezekiel is currently under the thumb of a very different kind of kingship—the rule of an authoritarian, conquering king, legitimated by religion, who consumes the weak and those unable to defend themselves. This makes his vision of God's leadership and reign all the more significant. The lost will be found, the weak tended, the injured bandaged, the lean fed. The fat, the ones who grew big and strong by unjustly feeding off the weak, will receive their just rewards. These images are vital ways of showing what kind of leader God chooses to be, and what the reign of Christ will entail.

- What unjust human rule do you notice in the world around you? How might this vision of God as king, caring for the lost in the flock, speak hope into these situations?

Psalm 100

In this psalm of praise, God is named as creator and king, faithful and merciful to all the lands. Unlike our other readings for Christ the King Sunday, the central function of the people in this song is to rejoice, to be joyful, to praise and move toward God. With the world as it is, crisis after crisis abounding, it can be easy for us to be ultra-focused on God's condemnation of what is unjust, punishments or retributions for those who refuse to serve the least of these. Yet, through this psalm, we are reminded that following God

is also about joy: joy in God's creation, joy in our own selves as God created us, joy in receiving mercy, and joy in God's faithfulness to us.

- When was the last time you experienced a moment of true joy? How can you pray with that moment, lift it up to God, and be thankful for it?
- How can you cultivate moments of joy in your life, even amid hard circumstances?

Ephesians 1:15-23

Paul is, if anything, an amazing teacher on the nature of Christ. Here, he speaks as though Christ's reign is already here, and it is a powerful image of the one raised from the dead, who now holds authority over the entire cosmos. No empire or leader can take this power from our crucified Lord, now raised. Christ's power and authority come from that act of laying everything down and walking through death into life again, on behalf of all those on this earth in need of new life. Because of this, God has lifted up his name, placed all of creation under his feet and into his body. In the context of Christ the King Sunday, this invites us to wonder how that authority is at work in our own lives.

- Who—or what—has authority over you in your daily activities?
- How might we live if we trusted that Christ did indeed have the only authority that mattered? What small step would you take first?

Matthew 25:31-46

In this passage, the reign of God is clearly seen as a time of reckoning. Matthew is consistent here in his distrust of religion that does not act in the best interest of the hungry, poor, and lost. Christ the King is the one who will implement a just rule for the world, a rule that privileges those who are in league with the weak, rather than those who are in league with the strong. Likewise, Christ as King can be found in those all around us who are strangers, hungry, naked, sick, in prison, and thirsty. The good news of this passage is the promise that, someday, the world will be turned over—and those who do the work of serving the least will be those who celebrate and rejoice with God. In our current world, with human powers reigning as they are, it can feel as though care for the least of these is an exercise in futility. These efforts may feel like a useless drop in an ocean of pain and injustice, but the promise to us in this passage is that in God's reign, in God's dream, in God's time, these drops create an ocean of restoration. God notices what we are doing, even if the powers and the authorities of this world seem to have no interest—and in time, it will matter.

- Who in your neighborhood is feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, healing the sick, or welcoming the stranger? How may the reign of Christ be found there among them?
- Based on who Christ claims to be in this passage, who in your neighborhood is Christ right now?

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