

# SAINT THOMAS CHURCH

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*Fifth Avenue · New York City*

**Sunday, November 20, 2022**

Christ the King

**Festal Eucharist**

11 a.m.

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A Sermon by

The Rev. Alison Turner, *Associate for Children and Family Ministries and School Chaplain*

on

Colossians 1:11-20; Luke 23:33-43

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***King of Kings, our King, our glory.***

***To him alone be majesty, glory, and power, to everlasting ages of ages. Amen.***

Today as we celebrate the end of another liturgical year and are poised to begin another, the focus of our worship, quite intentionally turns to the Feast of Christ the King, a feast day that was originally established for Christians to refocus their, our, dual call to honor him in worship and to be icons of God's love, God's peace in this world.

In the aftermath of World War I, Pope Benedict XV advocated that while there had been an end to war, there was no true peace. Troubled by the rise of division and nationalism he endorsed that such a peace can only be found in the Christ the King who comes as 'Prince of Peace'. The same Christ the King who watches over us and guides us by his teachings and example, and who dwells in our hearts with love. An example in which as Christians we are called live their lives in service, with Christ reigning in our minds, our wills, our hearts and in our bodies, and in the words of the St Paul, as instruments of justice unto God.

Bearing in mind the ongoing unrest in the world at present, perhaps it is time once again to ponder the kingship of Christ in our lives and wonder just what sort of king Jesus was, and is to each and every one of us today.

Throughout Advent we will proclaim all manner of names for Jesus, of God with us, Lord of Lords, Prince of Peace, Light of the World, Messiah and yes, King of Kings. Scripture is too no stranger to themes of power and glory, with texts like today's Epistle reading reminding us of our Lord's Kingship, his majesty and yes capacity to love and be a source of reconciliation throughout and beyond all of creation.

This King is the One who we are called to worship at the right hand of his Father in glory, and not ourselves. This King is too the source of our hope and 'In whom all things hold together'. Even our hymns, our anthems prayers, and sometimes our art, echo these themes of Christ the King in plenty: For thine is the kingdom, the power and glory for ever and ever. AMEN!

So today I wonder what this image associated with crowns, thrones and glorious splendor means to you, as you join on line and in Saint Thomas Church here in our worship this morning?

Some years ago, I lived near the Tower of London. It was a great place for school field trips and remains a popular tourist destination. Not only do the bright red clothed Beefeaters, and iconic Ravens outside guard its history, they also together guard the Crown Jewels on the inside. Jewels which are securely displayed in glass cabinets, on a pedestal out of reach, and somewhat out of sight to the smallest of visitors who all flock to get a glimpse of these bedazzling jewels. Jewels that were seen at the Coronation of her late Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II in 1953.

Arriving in Westminster Abbey wearing a velvet cloak, Elizabeth heard the choir sing Psalm 122, 'I was glad...'. She was handed the bejeweled royal orb, the scepter, and the royal ring before the famous Crown with its 444 precious stones was placed on her head. Everyone, including her husband, honored her with titles and swore allegiance to her. She rode away in a golden carriage as royalty and the powerful from all over the globe gathered and rejoiced singing 'God Save the Queen'.

Images we are likely to see repeated in the Coronation of King Charles next May. What kind of King will he be?, is clearly a burning question for many.

Perhaps he like Simba on Broadway, couldn't wait to be King. I imagine this new King's life will not be shrouded in the mystery of King Tutankhamun, whose exhibitions continue to draw fascinated crowds around the world with a mystery and fascination we also see in life, and posthumously in self and fan appointed rock stars. Will this new King Charles be like those crown jewels, symbols of his reign and yet inaccessible, detached and somewhat out of sight? Or is he more likely to be like his mother, a King, who even with high level security measures, feels called to meet, connect and touch the lives of his people, by whom he has not been elected or chosen, but anointed and called to serve.

This two-fold complex, and some would say contradictory call to reign and call to service, we see time and time again exemplified in the life of Jesus Christ. As sung in large revival gatherings of the 1980's. The man whose same hands flung stars into space, were to cruel nails surrendered....

This is our God the Servant King, he calls us know to follow him, to worship him. (Graham Kendrick, *The Servant King*, 1983). The same Jesus who shared the daily life and work of an ordinary home, went about teaching people about God and healing the sick. He called 12 ordinary men to be his helpers. The same Jesus had no money. wrote no books, commanded no army, wielded no political power. During his life, he never travelled very far. He was executed by being nailed to a cross at the age of 33. This man, is the very same Jesus we are called to worship, to which some might even say, How can this be the life of a man who is King?

When we turn to accounts of Palm Sunday, which is portrayed in all four the gospels, you will recall a familiar presentation of Jesus as King from the cheers and Hosannas and palm waving, akin to flag waving at a Jubilee Street Party. However, Jesus' procession turned quickly from echoes of Hosanna to words that call Crucify. A King who would carry his own cross, was also stripped of his garments and mocked. He bore the title King of the Jews, above that very Cross, while his hands held not an orb or ring but nails. His scepter was a piercing lance in his side. His crown was a crown of thorns and as our gospel today (Luke 23:33-43) also reminded us, this King Jesus, is the kind of king nobody ever imagined or desired. And so, on this Feast of Christ the King, we too are reminded that his kingdom is not of this world. Rather he is a king who emptied himself for us, and in so doing is one that turns the world upside down, and invites us to do the same.

So often we proclaim our faith in this King, this kingdom but don't we all at times default to an image of Jesus that minimizes his glory and underestimates his capacity to love, to reign, to reach to a broken world. In words of J.B. Phillips (also written in 1953) perhaps *Your God, our King, is too small?*

Perhaps what is all the more surprising is that in contrast to our secular lens on kingship, Jesus' being King goes hand in hand with compassion, vulnerability and humility, each seen from the moment of his incarnation. For this King Jesus too is one who welcomes everyone; those who are bruised and hurting into the life of his heart, including those criminals crucified on his left and his right. He also hopes for, and relishes the day when we also might say, Jesus remember me.

On this Feast Day as we look to the start of new liturgical year to prepare the way of the Lord, may we in our Advent worship and in our Advent lives find ways to recognize both his meekness and majesty, humanity and deity not as a contradiction, but a mystery into which his love comes to dwell among us all.

I end with a poem for Christ the King by Pamela Cranston (2019).

See how this infant boy  
lifted himself down  
into his humble crèche  
and laid his tender glove of skin  
against splintered wood—  
found refuge in a rack  
of straw—home  
that chilly dawn,  
in sweetest silage,  
those shriven stalks.  
This outcast king lifted  
himself high upon his savage cross,  
extended the regal banner  
of his bones, draping himself  
upon his throne—his battered feet,  
his wounded hands not fastened  
there by nails but sewn  
by the strictest thorn of love.