

SAINT THOMAS CHURCH

Fifth Avenue · New York City

Sunday, November 26, 2023

The Feast of Christ the King

Festal Evensong

4 p.m.

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A Sermon by

The Rev. Prisca Lee-Pae, *Associate for Pan-Asian Ministry*

on

2 Samuel 23:1-7; Matthew 28:16-20

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The throne of Christ within us

On this final Sunday of the church year, we reflect upon the idea that Christ is our King with a sense of hope and anticipation of what the worldwide rule of Christ would look like. However, this name also evokes criticism over the word “king,” a term that connotes a hierarchical understanding of God’s reign. This discomfort stems from the limitations of human language when attempting to articulate the absolute nature of God.

Unfortunately, those who do not have a good relationship with their fathers may feel uncomfortable using the expression God the Father. Likewise, some are concerned that the image of a political and secular king distorts Christ the King. It highlights the challenge of projecting our human images onto divine beings, potentially causing harm. Nevertheless, it's a two-way street—God, the Father, can illuminate the true nature of fatherhood, and Christ, the King, can impart insights into authentic kingship.

Christ, our King, holds authority over both heaven and earth. As we've journeyed through the past year, we've traced his unconventional path—from a surprising conception to a humble birth in a stable, a life spent among the marginalized, and a cruel death on the cross. His resurrection and declaration of authority, "all authority in heaven and on earth," resonate even two millennia later, affirming our acknowledgment of him as our king.

This authority differs significantly from the worldly power sought by earthly kings. Christ's authority serves to save God's people, uphold God's will, and radiate God's glory. The conception, birth, life, and death of our King was a journey we took together according to the church calendar of last year. Looking back on the past year, we're encouraged to reflect on how often we relinquished the throne within us to Christ. It's not just during pivotal decisions; rather, Christ should consistently occupy the center of our beings. The effort that we continually try to hand over that kingly position to Christ is prayer. This prayerful life allows us to live a life aligned with the true King's authority, benefiting not just ourselves but others as well.

The command to make disciples of all nations, baptize them, and teach them aligns with our responsibility to live out Christ's teachings. Leading by example becomes the most effective way to instill faith. Jesus' life, which was all about love for God and neighbors, serves as our guide. Acknowledging critiques from those who claim to like Christ but not Christians prompts us to recognize our own shortcomings. Let us, with sincere hearts, acknowledge our own struggle—a disparity between what we intellectually grasp and our ability to embody these teachings. This, we recognize, is because the authority of Christ might not reign fully in our lives, our trust in his heavenly dominion might waver, and doubts may linger within us.

Our gratitude extends to the Gospel of Matthew for its candid portrayal. Among the disciples who witnessed the resurrected Jesus on the mountain in Galilee, some grappled with doubt. This revelation is a balm to our own weak faith, a gentle assurance that our struggles are not grounds for harsh criticism but rather an invitation for acknowledgment and acceptance. Even the sincerest among us may grapple with frailty and uncertainty. Yet, as witnessed in the journey of those disciples, doubts can be dispelled, and faith can evolve into a steadfast assurance. We tread this path with grace, trusting that sincere faith, though initially wavering, holds the potential for profound growth and unwavering conviction.

In the Old Testament reading, we heard David's last words. His last words, despite his human flaws, illustrate how divine aid can transform an imperfect ruler into a life-bringing force for his people. The image of King David as light and life-giving rain can be seen as an indicator of the nature of the reign of Christ.

The One who said, "I am with you always, even to the end of the world," is with us at this moment, in this community, and with the neighbors with whom we must be together. As we approach the new church year, let's willingly surrender the throne within us to Christ. Much like dew-soaked tender grass growing under the morning sun, may our spirits remain fresh and grow even as we age physically. Let us pray that our clear, bright souls become conduits for comforting others, conveying hope, and sharing God's love.

Rev. Prisca Lee-Pae
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