

**Sunday, November 24, 2024**

The Last Sunday after Pentecost: Christ the King

+

A Sermon by  
The Rev. Mark Schultz

on

John 18:33–37

+

## **BBC Morning Worship: Christ the King**

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

“My Kingship,” says Jesus, “is not of this world.”

Beloved in Christ, this is very good news.

I mean, you can turn on the TV,

You can turn on the news,

Any channel most any channel,

You can pick up your phone

Look at your newsfeed, your social media,

Spend a good chunk of the day doomscrolling

You can do all that

And you can see the things of this world, the news from this world:

A recent contentious and divisive election here at home with international consequence ;

Wars and rumors of wars, threats of nuclear devastation, escalations of already catastrophic violence;

A global rise in xenophobia, racism;

The worldwide proliferation of demagoguery and nationalist authoritarianism;

Mass shootings, fires and floods, an epidemic of loneliness...

And you can see for yourself how dire the news from this world is.

How terrified and terrifying. How death-infected.

And how Good the Good News is:

Jesus’ Kingship is not of this world—

It has no part in all of that terror or violence or fear-funded scarcity or death.

This should be a great comfort to us,

But it’s also a great challenge:

Because it’s not an escapist comfort.

Particularly on the Feast of Christ the King,  
When it's easy in all of this talk of Kings and Kingdoms  
To imagine Jesus arrayed in rich and dazzling attire,  
Gold and precious jewels everywhere  
Seated on a great throne,  
Surrounded by saints and angels,  
Dazzlingly and supremely powerful,  
Almighty, in fact,  
Far above, it seems, the turmoil of the world:  
It's easy to imagine all that splendor  
And to put our hope  
In it.  
Because it looks so good. So amazing.  
We want it! We want to live into it! What a relief!  
Particularly in these troublous times  
How nice if the world could look like that.  
But...that is just a fleeting image, an attempt to speak an unspeakable glory in worldly terms,  
And our Lord's kingship is not of this world.  
Worldly splendor fails.  
The tropes and trappings of worldly glory, death-dealing dreams of dominion, however rich and  
tasteful:  
Shadows, drifting smoke: they fail.  
And the challenge on this Feast of Christ the King  
Is not to be ensnared or enticed by those woefully insufficient  
Imaginings of power, of kingship.  
Because if we are so enticed, if we take the shadow for the real: we miss the point—  
And our King Jesus becomes just another Tyrant, only more richly attired in that Light Inaccessible,  
Ready to give the imprimatur to all of our violent delusions of power and empire;  
And our Kingdom becomes just another nation,  
Only more amenable to our own prejudices and preferences;  
And the vision of grace does not confront, provoke, question or transform us  
But is twisted to merely comfort or assuage us or confirm us in our wickedness.  
We must guard against the Real kingship of Jesus becoming a grotesque fantasy of human power.  
Because, in thrall to this fantasy, it's easy to miss the wounds he lovingly bears that we gave him,  
The marks on the Hands and Feet and Side of Our King;  
Easy to ignore that the radiant crown on his head  
Is a crown of plaited thorns we made for him in scorn, it's red jewels not rubies  
But drops of his own precious blood;  
His face, the face of our King:  
The tear-worn, sweat and blood-streaked face of an unhoused migrant executed by the Roman state;  
The fullness of his being, poured out, in love, for us, that taking our death, we may have his life.  
It's easy to miss all that and make the Kingdom into a sterilized but still-poisonous  
Escapist fantasy of wealth and worldly power  
Losing sight of what it really means for Jesus to say:  
"My Kingship is not of this world" —  
Losing sight of the reality of the Cross,  
The reality of God's Love at the aching center of the world's pain, our pain,

Sharing in it, suffering with it,  
God in Christ opening his heart to it—our violence, our sin-sickness—to exhaust it all in his infinite life,  
Undoing death from the inside of our human brokenness  
And empowering us, by grace, not merely to witness,  
But to be love and bear love to the wounded world, lights of the world in this present generation,  
Meeting the moment with the fierce tenderness of his Kingly glory:  
The Glory of self-giving love.

My Kingship, says our Lord, is not of this world.  
Not of it. But in it.  
And the One who Reigns enthroned on the Cross will transform it.  
That's how love works:  
It transforms death into life  
Loneliness into community  
Division into diversity  
Sorrow into joy.  
If we want a share in the Kingship of Jesus,  
We'd do well to ignore the shadows of glory  
—the allure of worldly empire, violence, power and splendor—  
And learn, at the foot of the Cross, what it means to really love each other  
And herald with our very lives the King of Love whose kingship is not of this world.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

---