

SERMON: Christ Is All and Is In All

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Today is, as you may know, what we call “*Christ the King*” Sunday, which always occurs on **the Sunday before Advent**. And if you grew up in the Christian tradition, this language about “*Christ as King*” will very likely sound quite natural to your ears. It is so very common for us to refer to Jesus as “*Lord*” and “*King*.” And, because the Bible was written in a time that understood the world through the lens of kings and kingdoms, it’s language that continues to be passed on, *even as* many no longer ascribe to *living under the rule of a Kingdom*. And in fact, many have chosen to accept this language in the context of their faith specifically because of what we read in the gospels where Jesus offers us an alternative picture regarding kings and kingdoms. Jesus washed dirty feet. He ate meals with people that others disapproved of, and he touched people that were considered unclean. Jesus uses the language of the day and shows us another way in the context of what the people understood at the time. And so, *when we celebrate Christ the King*, we are celebrating things like sacrificial love and care for the earth and all beings. It’s the celebration of hope that *liberation for all is possible* – possible not through might, but through love. It’s the celebration of the realization that love and compassion are the true powers behind healing and transformation. And so as we gather here on this Christ the King Sunday, perhaps today is a good day to ask ourselves: *Who is the one we call Jesus, but who ultimately becomes Jesus the Christ?*

On the most basic of levels, perhaps we might begin with some of the things we recite in creeds:

- Before Jesus is identified as “the Christ,” he is identified first as a man.
- He is called the *Son of God* by followers and non-followers alike.
- He is known for defeating sin and death on the cross and ascending into heaven.

We know these things well, as they have become the basic building blocks of numerous credal statements that we recite when we come together. Something we tend not to recite but that is quite awe-inspiring, in Revelation chapter 5 and verse 5, we hear that Jesus, the Christ is *the only one who is able to open the scroll*.

And in Colossians, we hear that

Jesus is the image of God – a God who is otherwise invisible to us. We also hear that Jesus is an integral part of creation to the point that all things hold together through him. Take a moment with that, considering the implications of what that means: *In Jesus, all things hold together. Nothing is anything without Jesus*. Perhaps this invites us to ask the question:

- What is it that we need *Jesus to hold together for us?*
- Who do we know that we’d like to ask Jesus to *hold it all together for?*

And if all of that weren't amazing enough, what we hear as we turn our attention to Colossians, Chapter 3 is that, somehow, we actually share in all of this *with Christ*. Colossians 3:1: *Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above*. Colossians 3:11: *Christ is all, and is in all*.

The invitation of *Christ the King Sunday* is right there in Colossians 3. *Clothe yourselves with compassion and kindness, with humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with one another in love. Forgive as you are forgiven. Put on love.....because love binds us all together in perfect unity*. It is so incredibly difficult for us to understand what it means to "*be raised in Christ*," something that has to occur because we first died – *even as* we were already alive. Sometimes the easiest way to understand it is to incorporate it even more fully as Franciscan Richard Rohr does when he tells us that, "*We die a million times a day*."

How do we know we die and are born again? What evidence exists for such a thing? Perhaps it's in all the little moments. Maybe we *die and are born again* when we have a cutting remark right there on the tip of our tongues, but we choose not to say it. Perhaps it's in the moments where we forget about our own to-do lists while we sit with another and tend to their needs. Perhaps there's a rebirth when we choose a non-plastic alternative, a Fair-Trade alternative, an eco-friendly alternative. To *die with Christ* is to connect with how the spiritual reality is spilling over into our physical existence. It's to live into a multi-dimensional sort of unity where we feel connected to God, to others, to ourselves, and to the Earth. Perhaps dying with Christ is about suddenly becoming vibrantly aware that our *world is held together by Jesus the Christ, the one who is all and is in all*. And as that reality touches us, it transforms us. It moves us from one way of *being* to another, from one way of *thinking* to another. Perhaps *dying with Christ* is the lived experience of what we call "*The Kingdom of God coming near*." And if this is the case, then Richard is correct. We do die a million deaths a day. It happens all the time.

Take this story that a friend of mine posted on her social media page awhile back. The post contained a picture of *her older son carrying his younger sister*. Turns out, his baby sister had just gotten *hit in the head with a football at the park*. And immediately, big brother's instinct was to run to her rescue. My friend's post read, "I'm so proud of my son that he loves his little sister so well, that he sees her hurt, kisses her tears, picks her up, and carries her to safety." This is the call, isn't it – to see the one who is hurt, to have compassion on them, and to be the one to do something to help? This was the model Jesus offered over and over again, wasn't it? When Jesus was asked, "*Why do you heal on the Sabbath?*" his response was invariably, "*Why would I not help if I have the ability to?*" *Christ the King Sunday* is a chance to remember that if there is a "*Kingdom*" of God whether it's actually called a "*Kingdom*" or not, it is built on love. And *when we operate in love*, an unfathomable unity will appear in our world.

There will be no male nor female.

There will be no boss versus employee.

There will be no foreigner or immigrant.

“Love in Christ Jesus” is about being bound together in perfect unity. It’s almost unfathomable in our current world, but we dare to dream of the day – to hope for the day – to do our part to love into the day when we actually see it become a lived reality. *What will happen when the identities we have used to create divisions finally disappear?*

I’ll share with you another social media post from another friend of mine. It read: *A Muslim, a Jew, a Christian, a Pagan and an Atheist all walk into a coffee shop...and they talk, laugh, drink coffee, and become good friends.* How many more identities could we insert into that post? Unity is the law of love at work. And in order to get there, we’ll have to start by offering one another a little bit of grace. And if we think about it, this is no small thing. When we are mad about something – when we’re hurt about something – it’s usually a compound situation. Because, one little thing that happens one time or once in a great while, that isn’t so bad. It’s when we feel like something keeps happening. It’s when we feel repeatedly ignored, disrespected, or uncared for. It’s when we feel like others are being hurtful on purpose. This can happen inside of family units and among friends. But it also can happen in larger contexts – things that lead to political divisions and war. When this happens, there comes a need for repair at the community level.

How do we live into love in a world where the hurts go back generations before we were born?

The reality is: It has to start somewhere. The trauma is living in our DNA; it’s being passed down from generation to generation. On this Christ the King Sunday, what call can we live into that helps us begin to cooperate with the law of love – the law that will *bring healing, transformation, and repair?* What grace will we need to extend in order to be born again onto this path? Because the truth of the matter is that we all need grace. We are all – at least at times – responding out of our fears, anxieties, and hurts – out of our overwhelm and fatigue. Every single one of us will know all too well what it feels like to battle the chaos that is coming against us. And when we see someone who seems to be acting out of that place, *how do we find our way into offering them a little – or even a lot – of grace?*

It seems that the only possible way is to be born again – to experience that spiritual transformation that allows us to create a culture of forgiveness, compassion, and patience. We get there, at least in part, by doing what Paul invites us to in Colossians 4:2 when he tells us, *“² Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.”* In preparation for today, I came across a message I delivered to the congregation I was pastoring back in 2015. At that time, our church was in the middle of a series called, *“Hearing from God,”* and I had been leading a daily prayer time at 9:30 each morning for two weeks and counting. As I did that, I reported in that sermon that having this prayer time was helping me to remember to pray more often throughout the day and that I could feel more love inside of me for the people I was praying for. It can be such a **powerful** thing to *devote ourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful* as we do so.

And so on this Christ the King Sunday, I offer up a prayer for each and every one of us:

May we be born again into sacrificial love and care for the earth and all beings.

May hope for the liberation of all rise up within us.

And may compassion and love rise within us, leading us along the way of healing and transformation towards – not just unity – but perfect unity.

May we celebrate the Risen Christ who holds all things together, who is all and is in all. Amen.