

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ!

On this last Sunday in the church year, we are invited to see just what kind of a King our Lord Jesus is. Christ the King Sunday was started in the 1930s due to Mussolini, the rise of the Nazi Party, the Great Depression and despite the godlessness of the modern world and the notion that religion was a private affair, Pius wanted to convey that Jesus is Lord, is King of the world.

Jesus is king in a way that gives new meaning to the word sovereign, he is a sovereign who redefines the entire concept. He shapes it from two perspectives: the abundance and generosity of our king, and the response we are invited to make to our king's invitation. Jesus emptied himself for our sake, making himself available in love, vulnerable to our bad choices.

Our first lesson uses the image of shepherds portraying the leaders of Israel, portraying the king of Israel. They are pictured in a negative light because they have betrayed the trust the Lord God has put in them to care for God's people. "It is you who have scattered my flock, and driven them away, and you have not attended to them." It is an indictment from the Lord God, who then promises "I will raise up shepherds over them who will shepherd them, and they shall not fear any longer, or be dismayed, not shall any be missing, says the Lord."

That promise is fulfilled in Jesus Christ, our Shepherd, our King, whose care, whose concern for his people, for us, led him to make the ultimate sacrifice giving his life on the cross.

Today is Christ the King Sunday and the picture of the King we see is the king on a cross. Not quite the throne we expect, it changes our image of sovereignty. "...power and wealth and wisdom and might and honour and glory and blessing!" (Revelation 5:12) don't seem quite so obvious on the cross.

Yet the cross is the heart of the revelation of Christ the King, of Christ as King. It's the essence of our understanding of God, it's the sign of God's victory over sin, death and the power of the devil. Doesn't look much like it, does it? Doesn't to us and it certainly didn't to those who saw the crucifixion that day we call Good Friday. Religious leaders, one of the criminals hanging there, some of the soldiers, and passersby all mocked Jesus as he hung there. "King of the Jews" "Let him save himself as he saved others." They mocked him but in their mocking they spoke the truth.

Our King, our Shepherd indeed was saving others in his very act of hanging there. He secured salvation for the world, Christ the King so loved the world that he gave himself to die for us. The second thief hanging there recognized the truth about Jesus and as he was also dying he proclaimed it requesting "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." He chose wisely. You and I are also invited to respond to Christ's invitation, we choose the King.

But that means we also choose to be like the King, generous, self-giving, a witness and sign of God's compassion and mercy for the world, whether the world acknowledges it or not. We choose the King when we identify with the cross of Christ, when we identify with Christ crucified. We choose the King when we stand together with victims of the worldly kingdoms that oppress the voiceless, the poor, we choose the King when we put the good of those in need before our own needs, wants and comforts. We, like Jesus, find our power not in wealth and the accumulation of more wealth, not in treasures that rust and fade, but in washing the feet of the alienated, feeding the hungry, upholding the oppressed, those who all too often are not even seen or acknowledged by the shepherds entrusted to lead, care for and guide.

We choose the King when we give of ourselves for others as did Christ the King. And the gift that comes with Christ's offer of himself is the Kingdom of God. Hope and promise offered by our Sovereign Lord Jesus. Reconciliation to God and to one another, a life of wholeness and integration. Hope and promise for the sake of, in the midst of our shattered worlds, broken dreams and relationships, even our disillusionment with the things we once thought would bring us contentment, would bring us joy. Hope and promise come in the midst of our deepest anxieties and fears, and yes, hope and promise also come in the midst of our fulfillments and moments of joy and deepest meaning.

The good news comes in unexpected ways, in surprising places, and by the grace of God, as a gift! The good news comes and the cross is a sign of what the Apostle Paul writes in our second lesson this morning, "in him all things hold together."

AMEN