

SERMON for Sunday, November 26, 2006
John 18:33-37, Revelation 1:4-8

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With a Capital T

Christ the King Sunday. In rank of importance, it usually flashes by as the pre- or post- Thanksgiving Sunday, a mere pause between Reformation and All Saints' and Stewardship and Advent. In fact, assuming honesty among us, a blip in the church year and non-existent elsewhere. One minister confessed that on this particular day he longed to worship in a massive Gothic cathedral, with trumpeters and banners, attendants in festive costumes and all the trappings surrounding a great throne, and we would imagine the Lord Jesus Christ enthroned in our midst. Kind of like a Biblical *Medieval Times*, that restaurant/entertainment venue that would have you pretend the jousting is real, at least for an hour or two. Would we come closer to identifying with the image of Christ as King? For most of us, the closest we come to knowing royalty is the image of Helen Mirren as Queen Elizabeth in the new movie, *The Queen*, or our following the princes Harry and Will through the lens of the paparazzi. And no other world governmental leaders, be they elected in a democracy, or appointed, whether they earn their title or take it by force, inherit it or grab it, give us any idea at all of Christ the King.

So how is Christ our King? Catholic Cistercian monk Thomas Keating wrote, *...the reign of God is what happens. It is not any one thing that happens. It is the fact of God's entering our lives at any moment and shifting things around, and our consenting to the break-in....consenting to the break in.* Perhaps that is it! Christ is our king when we become the kingdom, when we become the working, breathing, living, community of Christ's own. Another pastor says, *...the heightened sense of God's presence is best found outside the sanctuary, where Jesus is king not in places of power, but in places where people try to serve him. Perhaps we will see him most vividly not among those who choose violence as a solution, but among those who practice peace-filled solutions. Yes, Jesus is king not where people seek advantage, but where people seek to be helpful...*

Christ will reign as king in the coming months in the halls of the Salvation Army on East Washington Avenue right here in Madison. For the past few years the Salvation Army has opened its hallways at night from December 1 through March 31 for a warming shelter, so that families who cannot find space anywhere else – and there are never enough beds for the homeless – can at least get in out of the cold, sleep on a mat on the floor, and survive the wintry night, heading out once again in the morning on the quest for a better life. At the October meeting of a small group of the Madison-area Urban Ministry, Sergeant Moore of the Salvation Army announced that they would not be opening the warming shelter this year – the \$25,000 needed was not in anyone's budget. That small group was moved, and headed by Everett Mitchell, Associate MUM director, became an army of its own and knocked on city hall doors to plead the cause: if we can afford a city pool in the summer, surely we can afford a roof over everyone's head in the winter. The new budget was approved, and the warming shelter will open next week. Christ will reign as king when we reach out to our neighbor.

Christ will reign as king in Bangladesh and other developing nations this year. The Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to Muhammad Yunus and his Grameen Bank. Yunus has been nicknamed a banker to the poor, for setting up the Grameen Bank to

extend small loans, known as microcredit, to the very poorest in Bangladesh, particularly women, enabling them to start up small businesses. \$50 or \$100 can be the difference between abject despair and the dawn of hope. This bank has been the inspiration for other institutions around the world to offer microcredit, and the Nobel Committee noted, *Lasting peace cannot be achieved unless large population groups find ways in which to break out of poverty...Muhammed Yunus has given a new perspective on life to the 1.1 billion people who live on less than a dollar a day.* Christ will reign as king when poor are lifted up.

Christ will reign as king in Africa, despite the continuing violence in Chad and Darfur, the scourge of AIDS and those who are its orphans, the many problems of poverty and hunger. Why? I was reading an article by Anglican pastor, Dr. Akintunde Akinade of Nigeria, as he explained, *...The African worldview adds another perspective for understanding the themes of mutual solidarity and togetherness. The African dictum, 'I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am,' captures the essence of this fundamental understanding of this community-in-communion. To be human in Africa is to recognize one's connection to the community.* Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa, who has long had a passion for global peace, and pursues it tirelessly, reiterated that last spring when he said, *We break the fundamental law of our being that we are made for togetherness, for interdependence, at our peril...we can be human only together, we can prosper only together.* Christ will reign as king when communities are whole and reconciled.

Christ will reign as king even in places like Lebanon, where an assassination took place earlier this week. Twenty years ago minister and professor at the Near East School of Theology Ben Weir was seized on the streets of Beirut by a group of Shiite extremists, and held in captivity for sixteen months. His story of his imprisonment, told in his book [Hostage Bound Hostage Free](#), is a remarkable testimony of hope and faith in the midst of terrorism and upheaval, a story of how he tried to see his captors as brothers. He concluded his memoir, *Life is divinely given. Each person is to be respected and deserves to be heard. The captors themselves need to be set free. We are all recipients of God's mercy and forgiveness. On that basis we can begin to trust each other and find the constructive things we can do together as Muslims and Christians.* Christ will reign as king when in the midst of hateful and violent acts, we can see one another as God's children, meant for living together in the peace.

Christ will reign as king in the halls and rooms of Hospice and hospital, not because cures are found for previously incurable diseases, nor because the occasional miraculous recovery occurs. Those halls are filled with bearers of hope in the work of nurses, of volunteers, of doctors, of chaplains. In the harsh world of lab reports and black and white pictures of how a body has gone awry, it almost seems as if there is no room for mercy, for loving-kindness, but over and over again, every day and on into the long hours of the watchful night, mercy is given in doses large and small. And Christ will reign as king through compassion and care.

Christ will reign as king, in so many ways throughout the world, everywhere God's love is enthroned in human hearts. No pomp and circumstance will accompany this king's entrance, no trumpets, no pageantry. In fact, many times this king will not even be recognized.

On every Christ the King Sunday I turn to one of my favorites of the Christmas season, the one-act opera of Gian Carlo-Menotti, *Amahl and the Night Visitors*. In the

opera, some kings were on their way to seek a newborn child king, and stopped overnight at the hut of a crippled shepherd boy and his mother. The accommodations were straw and a blanket on the floor, the food what the other shepherds could share, and the fire made from a few sticks. The poverty and suffering were evident, and in sharp contrast to the fine gifts of jewels and gold that the kings carried. As the boy Amahl and the kings slept, the worried and distraught mother succumbed to the temptation to steal gold from the kings, to save herself and her son from starvation. She is caught, but not punished. For one of the kings sings to her:

*Oh, woman, you may keep the gold.
The child we seek doesn't need our gold.
On love, on love alone He will build his kingdom.
His pierced hand will hold no scepter.
His haloed head will wear no crown.
His might will not be built on your toil.
Swifter than lightning He will soon walk among us.
He will bring new life and receive our death.
And the keys to His city belong to the poor.*

Christ will reign as king. And that is the saving truth. Amen.