



“Eternal Promises of the King”

Christ the King Sunday
5:30 pm Saturday, November 19, 2016
8:30 & 10:45 am Sunday, November 20, 2016
The Reverend John H. Brock
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church
Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

Colossians 1:11-20; Luke 23:33-43

Grace to you and peace, from God who is, who was, and who is to come. Amen.

This is the weekend we celebrate the end of our church year with Christ the King. It's the last Sunday in our church year, and so for the last week or so, I've been wondering what it means when we say that Christ is our King. What does it mean to you, personally, individually, to say that Christ is King? And what does it mean to us, as a whole, as a congregation, that Christ is King?

By now, many of you are aware that I have a diagnosis for the swelling in my legs. Lymphoma was not exactly the answer I was hoping for, but at least it's an answer, and we know how to deal with it. Treatment began this week, and thus far, has been alright. I'm probably not my usual “perky” self. I know I am *far* more grumpy than usual (although my family would most definitely say, how can you tell?) But we have a plan; we have an end in sight; and treatment with drugs seems to me to be better than surgery, which is what my doctor was thinking if we didn't get a definitive answer.

I know I am going to be okay. I have a strong trust in my doctor and modern medicine. I have wonderful support of my family. I have great support from all of you. And I trust that God walks with me through all that is happening, whatever happens. Because, I strive to live with Christ as King in my heart.

Then, another plus from the past couple of weeks, regardless of what you think about the outcome, we finally, after, what, close to two years, have come to an end to the presidential race. I, personally, find that to be a great relief. I wasn't going to be pleased whatever the outcome, but at least it's over. I *am*, though, disheartened by the followers of the one candidate who are resorting to violence to show their displeasure, acting in many respects like children who didn't get their way and so they're throwing a temper tantrum. And I am greatly saddened at the followers of the other candidate who are spreading message of hate, intolerance and ethnic “purity.” I have to wonder, how many of the folks who are doing any of this, claim, or perhaps I should say, allow, Christ to be King in their lives?

A really cool thing took place in my life, though, at the beginning of the month, which was that I was invited back to the congregation I served in Connecticut, as they celebrate their 125th anniversary all year long. I served St. John's Lutheran in Stamford CT as their Director of Youth Ministry for six years before I went to seminary. I enjoyed being

back there, and seeing so many people with whom I worked, with whom I worshiped, and with whom I ministered to.

It was a great congregation to be a part of at that time. They were: large; healthy; and positive. With a membership of around 1600 baptized, we were worshipping about 250 people a week, and were served by a full-time lead pastor. We also had a full-time Music Director, a full-time Director of Senior Ministry, and, as I said, me. We had a part-time office manager, book keeper, and a live-in sexton. Like Trinity, we had a pre-school. And while our facility wasn't used by outside organizations nearly as much as Trinity is, there were often meetings or other events happening throughout the week.

They were, at that time at least, a congregation that I would say was striving to set Christ as King of their hearts and ministry. They were able to accomplish this on a budget of (when I left, in 1993) about \$1.3 million.

I mention that figure, because the last thing I want to bring up is that we had our monthly Trinity council meeting this past Monday. The Finance Team came in to present the proposed budget for 2017. Which, before I say anything, I need to remind us that here at Trinity Lutheran Camp Hill, we have a baptized membership of around 2600, with six times of worship each week, where we have been averaging around 750 people a week. We have ten full-time staff people, including three pastors, music, youth, office personnel, and two sextons. We have ten part-time people, consisting of one pastor two music, one education, four receptionists, and a sexton. Our facility is used, either by us or outside organizations, *seven days a week* (when I arrived here at 11:00 a.m. Saturday morning, there was a choral group practicing in the nave for an upcoming Saturday night concert). If you look at the calendar at the back of the *Trinity Today*, you'll see how many *outside* organizations, let alone Trinity groups, are here on a weekly, or even *daily*, basis. We support a myriad of ministries (again, look at the *Trinity Today*), and have so many of our own programs going on that I honestly cannot tell you what all we, as a congregation, are doing.

On the one hand, I would have to honestly say that we are a congregation that is striving to put Christ as king in our hearts.

And then I heard what the Finance Team proposed as the budget for next year. Which is, admittedly, larger than the budget for 2016. It is, however, barely larger than St. John's 1993 budget.

I have to say, that I *do* believe that the Finance Team has done the best that they and the Stewardship Team can do, given the resources they have been told with which they have to work. The difficulty I see with our proposed budget, is that, during the past eight years, ministry support has had to be cut; we have cut staffing positions; we have had to put off *necessary* repairs to our building; and **if** staff received any kind of wage increase, it was minor at best. We have cut our budget to the bone.

I understand that the country as a whole has been struggling with recession. What I struggle with, is when Stewardship Team presented the average amount that people give, I could see that great amount of the membership that gave, financially, so very

little.

What does it mean to say, Christ is King of our lives, and then keep our pocketbooks closed?

I think I have shared before that, as Director of Ministry for Parish Life (which is my long, fancy title), this past fall we sent out several hundred letters to members from whom we had no record of communing or contributing for over two years (Let me say that again, we have a baptized membership of 2,600, and I sent out **hundreds** of letters to folks from whom we have no record of communing or contributing in two years or more). Admittedly, some of our records were incorrect, and we apologized in advance if our records were incorrect.

I received a note back from one couple who let me know that they had been members here for several decades, and during that time had given quite a bit of money. They included in their response a check for \$1000, which was to be their contribution for the year. And \$1000 is *not* an amount to be dismissed or ignored. Except, when you break it down, it becomes \$500 per person for the year. And more realistically, it becomes less than \$10 a week per person. So, to look at another way, Trinity means as much to them as having lunch at Arby's once a week. Regardless of the worship and pastoral care; not including any education or ministry opportunities they could be involved in, to some, financial support to Trinity is the same as grabbing a weekly fast food lunch.

I absolutely understand that there are those of us who can barely afford \$5 a week. And I applaud those who *give* that much when they cannot afford to. I have also been told of individuals who don't like some of the ministry that is happening at Trinity, and so, to show their dissatisfaction, rather than speaking to any of the pastors or council members, they are simply reducing their giving, some all the way down to \$1 week. And I would have to ask someone who was doing that, is that the *best* way to show that Christ is king of your heart?

In our Colossians reading this morning, we heard that big, beautiful language describing Christ. But often that type of language goes right over our heads. In our gospel lesson, we heard Christ proclaimed in much more direct language. We heard Christ proclaimed as King. And we heard one of the two condemned criminals proclaim him as such, as well.

If Christ is king, **then** we, too, are to receive that same eternal promise that was given to the man on the cross. **If** Christ is king, **then** we, too, are called to trust Christ, and not our secular government. **If** Christ is king, **then** we, too, are called to trust Christ, and not our medical community. **If** Christ is king, **then** we, too, are called to trust Christ, and support Christ, with our actions, our talents, our gifts; whatever mission and ministry that we choose to be a part of. If that ministry is Trinity, then that is great, and support Trinity with your time, and abilities, . . . and your wallet. If that Ministry is Bethesda Mission, then that's great, and support Bethesda with your time, and abilities, . . . and your wallet. If that Ministry is New Hope, or Rocky Boy Indian Reservation, or LAMPa, or whatever, then that's great, and support that mission and ministry with your time, and abilities, . . . and

your wallet.

Christ has promised to be with us until our end. **If** we proclaim Christ as king, and **then** ignore him in our hearts in our actions, in our time and in our abilities, and in our wallet, are we truly proclaiming Christ as King in our lives?

Amen.

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