

Last Pentecost, November 24, 2020 Year A
Feast of Christ the King,
Church of the Mediator
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Today, last Sunday after Pentecost/ Feast of Christ the King

Church celebrates Jesus as King of kings and Lord of Lords. For several weeks the lectionary has pointed us toward the Day of the Lord in ominous and somber tones, and we might expect this morning's readings to focus on the return of the Davidic monarchy, the restoration of Jerusalem, and Christ's reign in glory with angels, archangels and all the company of heaven. In my own mind, as a total anglophile, when I think about kings, the stately reign of King George V and Queen Mary come to mind, but Jesus, as he is wont to do, disposes of protocols, ceremony and grandeur. There are no bows or deep curtsies to him. Rather he reminds us that as we care for the least of the members of his family – that is the hungry, thirsty, the stranger or prisoner, and those in great poverty or suffering – then we are caring for the King himself.

It's no wonder then, that the church throughout history has taken responsibility for feeding the hungry, and sheltering the homeless, and ministering to the sick and friendless. We realize that our Lord is a hidden Lord, always in disguise, but waiting anxiously to be revealed.

The gospel helps us recognize and claim the baptismal truth that every baptized person is a minister of Christ and to Christ, and teaches us that the hidden Lord becomes visible, real and present to us when we go about the living out of those works of mercy and charity. And of course, once he's been revealed to us and made known, then the power of his salvation and the grace of his judgment may be revealed to us also.

But we can't for a moment believe that it's only by our works of mercy that God's kingdom is revealed. God is eternally at work, like a shepherd, preparing us for the kingdom. Listen to the words of the prophet Ezekiel as he brings a word of rescue and redemption to us.

God says, "I myself will search for my sheep and seek them out, and rescue them.

I will bring back those who have strayed.

I will bind up the injured.

I will strengthen the weak.

I will feed them.

This is what God will do. Here the reign of God is seen in terms of a pastoral relationship between God and God's people, with God as the principal actor.

The Church too has her part to play in the reign of Christ – a role of exhorter, teacher, and sacred sign to point the way into the kingdom. The Church's key to unlock the gates of the kingdom are the sacraments, those wonderful mysterious, outward and visible signs of the inward and spiritual grace given to us as a pledge of God's presence in our lives.

In this time of pandemic, when our church doors are closed and we can't experience the sacraments in their liturgical format, it's important, I believe, to remember them as visible daily – holy, meaningful and helpful in our everyday experience.

The prophet Ezekiel would never have thought of his description of God as a shepherd in a sacramental way, but go back for a moment and look at the verbs in those sentences from this morning's Old Testament reading:

God will search, seek, rescue – *reminds us of Baptism* – called, included, gather, and create community.

God will Bring back, – *Reconciliation* – bring back, return to peace, put right, and make whole. It's not going back to the old ways, but seeing the relationship in new and healthy ways.

God will Bind up – *Anointing, healing* – community of healing pouring balm of care and support

God will Strengthen – *Confirmation* – encouragement, giving courage for mission and ministry

God will Feed – *Communion* – share with others in the mystery of death, life, and but in practical ways when we nourish one another in body and soul

Living out the sacraments in intentional, prayerful ways is perhaps the best way we can be the church in a time when many of us feel so disconnected from our familiar forms of worship and connection.

We are reminded, then, that God works in us and we accomplish God's work in the world. Jesus so pointedly reminds us that when we minister to one another offering refreshment, care, clothing, visitation and welcome we are ministering to the King himself and bringing God's reign to the immediate present moment. Jesus said, "truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me." For Christians, this feast day of Christ the King is a reminder that God's reign is not in some far off distant future, but is born in the present moment when we bless one another with simple ordinary things of kindness and mercy, and find ourselves blessed in return.