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*Christ Lutheran Church, Ferndale*

*Christ the King Sunday*

*November 20, 2022*

*Jeremiah 23:1-6; Psalm 46; Colossians 1:11-20; Luke 23:33-43*

Last month when I was recovering from Covid I binged some Netflix and started watching “The Crown,” the fictional historical drama depicting the reign of Queen Elizabeth II. Now Mike and I have only gotten through about half of season 2, so if you’ve seen all 5 seasons, please don’t give us any spoilers.

However, even in watching only one and a half seasons, it’s clear that, in the Netflix drama at least, whatever the Crown, the British monarchy, says goes. People literally bow down to the Crown. The Crown created a centuries-old system of power and prestige that, which as we know, still continues at least in part today.

So that was one image I had in my mind as I prepared for Christ the King Sunday this year.

Another image I had was one I was reminded of by my colleague Pastor Joel Langholz at Our Saviour’s Lutheran Church in Fairhaven in his congregational newsletter this week (I did get his permission to share his words with you). He recalled how Christ the King Sunday is a relatively new liturgical day in the church calendar, instituted by Pope Pius XI in 1925 in response to a growing threat of secular nationalism to remind the church and the world of Christ’s power above all others.

The problem, Pastor Joel said, is that such a reminder of Christ’s kingship has turned, in some circles, to a rise of Christian Nationalism. The group “Christians Against Christian Nationalism” describes the phenomenon like this:

“Christian nationalism seeks to merge Christian and American identities, distorting both the Christian faith and America’s constitutional democracy. Christian nationalism demands Christianity be privileged by the State and implies that to be a good American, one must be Christian. It often overlaps with and provides cover for white supremacy and racial subjugation.”

Pastor Joel writes, “Christian Nationalism was on display on January 6, 2021 as rioters, draped in a mix of Christian and American flags, violently stormed the US Capitol chambers. This year as we celebrate Christ the King Sunday, we are reminded of the power that Christ displays and how it differs from the displays of power we often experience on earth. Christ’s power is not an earthly power that uses fear or might to demand subjugation. God’s power does not show up in the way that we would expect or even desire. God shows up on a cross, suffering with criminals at his side.”

Pastor Joel is right. Because here’s the thing: Christ’s kingship is not like the Crown’s, and it’s not what Christian Nationalists believe. Christ the king was nailed to a cross. Christ the king was scoffed at and mocked. Christ the king did not save himself but others, at his own cost. Even though we might think of Christ the King as almighty and all powerful and authoritarian, Jesus did not align himself with the values of power, might, and authority that Christian nationalists ascribe to him. Jesus was not about winning at all costs. That’s not the kind of king Christ was.

There are very few times in our lives when we respond well to someone with great power trying to control us, do we? We don’t like someone else deciding for us or managing every aspect of our lives.

Well Jesus doesn’t seek to control us, Jesus seeks to walk with us. Jesus forgives us when we do not know what we are doing. Jesus lifts up those who are burdened and bowed down—as we sing in our beloved Holden Evening Prayer service, “You have cast the mighty down from their thrones and uplifted the humble of heart.” And at

the end of our lives, Jesus welcomes us with the same words he said to the criminal on the cross: “truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.”

Christ is king because he meets us in the depths of our suffering. Christ is king because he enacts a new kingdom that has no walls and favors no nation over others. Christ is king because he marks us in baptism to love and care for one another, especially those who need lifting up. Christ doesn't display power *over us*, Christ *empowers* us to do what it says in Colossians: to endure everything with patience, while joyfully giving thanks to the Father who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.

And if you want to know how to access this kind of power Christ the king offers you, you might be surprised to know that all you need to do is sit there. All you need to do is be still. Psalm 46 reminds us, “Be still and know that I am God.”

This week when you are feeling a need for refuge and strength, stop, sit, be still, know that God is God, and God empowers you in baptism to be Christ's hands, heart, and mercy in the world. Thanks be to God. Amen.