

Christ the King Sunday always sneaks up on me. One minute we're coasting along in the late weeks of Pentecost, and the next minute the church calendar says, "Brace yourself, here comes Christmas." (And yeah, it makes me nuts that retail started playing Christmas music before Halloween was over.)

But here we are again in the Church, standing in that doorway between what has been and what's coming. Christ the King Sunday was proclaimed by Pope Pius XI in 1925 as a response to the rising power of dictatorships and fascism in Europe, and how people were being asked to pledge their loyalty to leaders who ruled through fear.

But the Church watched all that happening and said, "*No. We will not bow to false power. Christ is our King. Not empire. Not fear. Not the loudest voice. But Christ, God the Son.*" Those still feel like essential words for us to hear and proclaim today.

And what's so striking is this: on the Sunday when we talk about kingship and power, the Gospel does not show us a king in velvet robes or seated on a throne. It shows us Jesus on a cross, between two men who have been condemned, and surrounded by mocking voices. And over his head, someone nailed a sign meant to be a joke: "*This is the King of the Jews.*" You can almost hear the snickering and jeering.

Yet somehow that little wooden sign ends up proclaiming the most profound truth in the whole scene.

Because *this* really *is* the King.

A king who forgives the very people hurting him.

A king whose power is compassion.

A king whose authority is love.

A king who turns toward the man next to him and speaks hope into the last place he expected to find it.

Then we get Paul's beautiful hymn in the letter to the Colossians—a hymn about Christ who is before all things, in whom all things were created, in whom *all things hold together*. Not some things. Not just the spiritual things. Not only the easy things. **All things.**

This is what Richard Rohr calls the "all-ness" of Christ, the Christ who is woven into the fabric of creation itself. The Christ who holds the universe and also holds the fragile threads of our own lives. The Christ who is the center not just of our faith, but of our reality. The Christ who is always gathering, always reconciling, always drawing things back toward God's love.

So if Luke gives us Christ the compassionate King on the cross, then Colossians gives us Christ the cosmic King who holds everything together. And together they tell us that Christ's kingship is not about domination from above, it's about love from within.

It's about a King who rules the human heart, not by force, but by presence. Not by fear, but by mercy. Not by control, but by example.

I'm wondering what it means for us to follow a king like that, a king who rules with mercy, leads by example, *and pushes back on exploitation, especially of those on the margins.*

Because Jesus didn't walk around smoothing things over just to keep the peace. He didn't look the other way when someone was being used, or cheated, or silenced, or pushed aside. He didn't say, "Well... this is just how the world works." Jesus challenged systems that harmed people. Sometimes gently. Sometimes boldly. But always compassionately. Always with love.

So following a king like this means mercy becomes our default, our center. It means compassion is the posture we bring to the world. It means forgiveness is strength, not weakness.

Following a king who pushes back also calls something courageous out of us. It means paying attention to the places right here in our world, right in our neighbors' lives, where someone is being diminished or excluded or used. It means listening when a small voice inside us says, "This isn't right." It means speaking up, stepping in, making room, and lifting each other up.

And the most important thing always: we don't do any of this alone. We learn it in community. We practice it together, imperfectly, stumbling and getting back up, but we do it as people who trust that Christ is holding us together while we learn how to love like him.

Which brings me to gratitude. Because gratitude grounds us. Gratitude softens our heart so love can get in. Gratitude helps us see the places where Christ's "all-ness" is at work, not in flashy ways, but in small mercies, steady friendships, and the quiet ways God holds us close.

And this week, right on the edge of Thanksgiving, I want to gently invite you into a moment of reflection with a simple question:

What are you grateful for right now?

I mean the real things.

The things that keep you breathing.

The things that remind you that Christ truly is holding all things together.

Diana Butler Bass writes: "*Gratitude is not a feeling; it is a way of being that reminds us we are connected to God and to one another.*" I love that. Because that's really what Paul is talking about

in Colossians. Gratitude helps us see the threads, those holy threads that bind us to God, and to each other, and to this world Christ so deeply loves.

Last year, around this time, our beloved Debbie Randzio shared with us Opa's Grace, a prayer written by her grandfather. Debbie told me it was one of the treasures of her family, and she shared it with her whole heart. This is our first Christ the King Sunday without her, and many of us feel that ache in different ways. So it seems right to let her voice echo through this room again.

Opa's Grace

*We pause, O God, to offer thanks
For seasons come and seasons gone,
For hope renewed with each new dawn,
For labor in the heat of day,
For dusk which carries fears away.
And now we humbly ask Thy blessing
On the food prepared for sharing,
On this fellowship of caring,
On days to come that we may see
A world at peace, in harmony.*

I love how this prayer holds together gratitude and hope, just like Paul says all things are held together in Christ. I love that it prays not just for the meal, but for “fellowship of caring.” That’s God’s kingdom language. That’s Christ’s way. That’s the “all-ness” of Christ expanding into community.

So as we turn the page toward Advent, I pray that gratitude will open your heart, that mercy will guide your steps, that courage will rise in you when something needs to be set right, and that love, deep, steady, Christ-shaped love, will continue to bind us to one another.

Because Christ the King is not about hierarchy or pomp.

It is about belonging.

It is about community.

It is about following the One who rules with mercy, leads by example, and refuses to let anyone be exploited or forgotten.

And through it all, Christ, our King, our center, our “all in all”, is already holding us together.

Amen.