

SERMON FOR SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 21, 2010
CHRIST THE KING\THANKSGIVING SUNDAY

Scriptures: Psalm 100, Colossians 1:11-20, Jeremiah 23: 1-6, Luke 1: 68-79

We Give Thanks for Christ Our King

It is interesting that this Sunday is called “Christ the King” Sunday and it comes one week before the first Sunday in Advent. On this day we think about Jesus whose kingly throne is in heaven, though one day he will return as king of both heaven and earth. Next Sunday we will remember that Jesus came to earth as a baby born in a stable and laid in a manger. Throughout Christian history there have been many debates and heated discussions about Jesus, his divinity and his humanity. Was he just a man? Could he truly be God– in the flesh? Was he only divine and not human at all?

Today we give thanks for all the blessings of our lives, and we give thanks for Jesus Christ whose reign is for ever and ever. Revelation 5 gives us these words about Christ the King: “Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. In a loud voice they were saying:

“Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!” Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, saying:

“To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!”

Jesus Christ the Lamb of God who was slain to take away the sins of the world will reign forever! I have been thinking a lot about the words of Scripture which tell about Christ’s first coming, and his second coming as well, as I prepare for the Advent season. I am excited about the upcoming programs we will be having on Wednesdays

at noon in December, hearing the words and music of that great oratorio by George Frederic Handel, *Messiah*. The words of Old Testament prophecy, the fulfillment of prophecy in the birth of Jesus, the death and resurrection of Jesus, and his coming again at the end of the world are all presented in musical form. Each week we will listen to some of the oratorio and then hear the passages read from the Bible. There will be a time of exploring and thinking about what they mean. People in the community are being invited to come too. It will be a special time because no one who comes will have to do any work or prepare in any way. It will be a time to get away from the busyness and commercialism of the season and get spiritually recharged.

The Old Testament prophet Jeremiah told about the Savior who would one day be born, a Savior who would make all things new and right. ““The days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land. In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. This is the name by which he will be called:

The LORD Our Righteous Savior.”

In Jeremiah’s time the people longed for justice and righteousness. They lived under oppression and apostasy. God’s people still lived in that same way hundreds of years later when Jesus was born in Bethlehem. They wanted so much to have a king to save them from their earthly enemies, instead they got a poor son of a carpenter— or so they thought. They wanted Jesus to be the king they cheered for on Palm Sunday saying *hosanna, King Jesus*. Jesus came not as a king, but a servant, and he was despised. They wanted someone strong enough to take authority away from the Romans. Instead, they got what they thought was a weak, humble human being with no power who was taken away to be crucified. Even on the cross, he did not show his kingly qualities. He was beaten and spit upon, nails were driven into his hands and feet, and he was made to endure the torture of the cross. Could he have chosen

something different? Of course. Jesus Christ the servant of all chose instead to do what he had been sent by the Father to do— die for all people. It was in his rising from the dead that he showed his power and might and his kingliness.

The passage I read from the book of Luke a little while ago is like an answer to the words from the prophet Jeremiah. Zechariah the priest spoke the words giving praise to God for the birth of his son John. John would become known as John the Baptist, and his job would be to be to prophesy about the One who was coming— the Messiah. John's words would be, "Prepare the way of the Lord." Jesus was born only a short time after John. John's parents were very old and childless: his was a miraculous birth. Jesus was born of a virgin, another miraculous birth. Zechariah and Elizabeth's son John spoke of Jesus who would come bringing salvation and the forgiveness of sins. Because of the tender mercies of our God, Jesus would come as a bright and shining light to a world in darkness and the shadow of death.

The words of Zechariah were true, the people walking in darkness have seen a great light, and that light is King Jesus! We thank God for his love and goodness in sending Jesus into the world! If Jesus had not come, where would we be now? We should all stop and think about that at times. Because of Jesus much light has shone into the dark and needy places in our world. Consider all of the Christian charities, the hospitals, the schools which operate because of Him. Think of all the more secular organizations whose work force is made up of people with Christian values who do the work well because of Him. In just the last week I received pleas for help for the needy from these different places: The Salvation Army, the Muskegon Rescue Mission, St. Jude's Hospital, United Church Outreach Ministries, The American Bible Society, and Boys' Town. All of those are Christian organizations, yet I got many more from other organizations which are not called Christian but they do good work and appeal to the heart of a Christian person.

Thanksgiving is truly a blessed time. We have so much to be thankful for. But it is also a time of stress, because wherever large groups of people who are somehow related to one another get together there can be tension. I was talking about this to someone this week. This person was explaining that she has to sometimes tell people who gather at her home that there will be restrictions on certain topics of conversation. For instance, if your family has very liberal and also very conservative people in it, the best thing would be to say politics are off limits. If you have a person who is a vegetarian and very much against hunting and the killing of animals for food, it would be good to have plenty of vegetables, breads and the like on your table. It would also be good in that situation to tell the hunters in your family not to show their pictures of the big ten-point bucks they shot this past week.

Emma Bombeck said about Thanksgiving: "Thanksgiving dinners take eighteen hours to prepare. They are consumed in twelve minutes. Football half-times take twelve minutes. This is not coincidence." Jay Leno said: "You can tell you ate too much for Thanksgiving when you have to let your bathrobe out." Meister Eckhart, a mystic and theologian of the 13th century wrote these words, "If the only prayer you said in your whole life was, "thank you," that would suffice."

An unknown author wrote this story.

Every child in the village was very much excited on account of the news that had come down from the castle on the hill. Because it had been such a rich harvest, the fields yellow with grain and the orchards crimson with fruit, the King was going to keep a thanksgiving day. He was going to ask some child from the village to come up the hill to the castle and eat dinner with the Prince and Princess. It was rumored, too, that this child would be given good gifts by the King. But it must be a very special kind of child indeed. That they all knew. Oh, a thanksgiving day in the castle would be very wonderful indeed, the children thought, and each hoped that he or she would be chosen to go.

The day before this day of thanksgiving the messenger of the King came down from the castle and went from door to door of the homes in the village. He went first to the house of the burgomaster. It was a very pretentious house with tall pillars in front, and it stood on a wide street. It seemed likely that the burgomaster's child might be chosen to go with the messenger to the castle for the thanksgiving. She was dressed in silk, and her hair was curled, and the burgomaster had packed a great hamper with sweets as an offering for the King.

"Are you ready to keep the feast as the King would like you to?" asked the messenger.

"Oh, yes!" said the burgomaster's child. "I have on my best dress, and here are plenty of sweets to eat. Will you take me?" But the messenger shook his head, for the child was not ready

Then the King's messenger went on until he came to the house where the captain of the guards lived. The captain's little boy was quite sure that he would be chosen to go with the messenger to the castle for the thanksgiving. He wore a uniform with silver braid and buttons like that which the guards wore. A sword hung at his side, and he wore a soldier's cap. He held the cap in his hand, so that he could put it on quickly.

"Are you ready to keep the thanksgiving day as the King would like you to?" asked the messenger. "Oh, yes!" said the child of the captain of the guards. "I have my sword here and I can fight any one who crosses our path on the way to the castle. Will you take me?"

But the messenger went on again and he came to the baker's shop. The baker's boy stood at the door, dressed in his best white suit, and holding an empty basket on his arm. He was quite sure that he would be chosen to go to the palace, for his father's bake shop was an important place in the village. They measured their flour carefully,

and weighed the loaves so that they might receive the utmost penny for each. They very seldom had any crumbs left for the poor, but they were selling a great deal of bread every day.

"Are you ready to keep the thanksgiving day as the King would like you to?" the messenger asked of the baker's boy. "Oh, yes!" the boy said. "I have this basket to gather up whatever remains of the King's feast and bring it home with me. The King would not want anything wasted. Will you take me?" But the messenger shook his head a third time, for the child was not ready.

Then he did not know which way to go, and he began to think that he would not be able to find any guest for the King's feast. As he waited, he saw two children, a girl and a boy, coming toward him. They were poor children, and one was leading the other, for he was lame. The messenger looked at them. The little girl had eyes like stars and her hair, blowing in the November wind, was like a cloud made golden by the sunset. She held her head so high, and smiled so bravely that no one would have noticed her old dress and the holes in her coat. The messenger stood in the road in front of her and spoke to her.

"Are you ready to keep the thanksgiving day as the King would like you to?" he asked. The little girl looked up in the messenger's face in surprise. "No, I am not ready," she said, "but this child is. I am bringing him because he is lame, and because he is hungry. Will you take him?" she asked. "Yes," said the messenger, "and you, too. There is room at the King's table for both."

Dear friends, King Jesus makes room at his table and in his home for all who love him, all who are ready. Will you invite Jesus Christ to be present at *your* Thanksgiving table this year, and include him in all you do this holiday season, giving thanks in all situations for God's gift of love, King Jesus?

