



***A sermon preached by The Right Reverend Thomas J. Brown, Bishop of Maine to the Episcopal Diocese of Maine for the service of Christ the King
November 22, 2020***

In the late part of morning on Halloween day, our neighbor died. His name was Larry and in just a few short months, Tom and I and Betsy and Larry have nourished a great friendship. Earlier this year Larry was diagnosed with cancer and immediately afterwards he set to work writing a memoir, primarily for his young grandchildren as a way to tell his story. He shared it with me and Tom too.

It's so powerful isn't it, as all of us know, to hear or read another's life story. Larry had a long and illustrious career as a diplomat, and his story is filled with anecdotes about his work around the world. But mostly, it's a story of a man who loved his family. And yet the memoir is more than an autobiography. Toward the end, Larry gives to his children and grandchildren a kind of charge about America - at once extolling and critiquing it - all the while encouraging his loved ones to engage as citizens. He wrote, "There are many ways to serve our country. It's not only in war or in government. It needs constant reform and vigilance. Its' sins are many but so are its virtues."

Today, thousands of Christian communities are focused on Christ the King or the Reign of Christ, a day to consider citizenship in a different country, one that is Gospel-shaped. We could object to this day and it's theology, and indeed there are those who jettison this Feast suggesting that its origins in 1920s Roman Catholicism are neither relevant nor helpful, and I can see the point. Surely to Jewish and Islamic ears, the phrase from the opening collect, "Brought together under his most gracious rule," sounds a lot like triumphalist language of power, of Christian imperialism.

And if we listen carefully we'll hear in this prayer and in these readings and in the music that we make on this day nothing about political, military, or even cultural conquest. I suppose there are some within Christianity who claim superiority, setting themselves above and over other traditions, but that has not been, and is not now our way. God's powerful desire to restore us to unity with God's own self and each other in Christ - that's what moves us to keep this Feast. God invites us to be citizens, passport holders, of another country. Prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah, and today Ezekiel express this kind of unity for the people of Israel, of course, and a longing for a restored world, and we do too.

My late friend and neighbor said that, "Government needs constant reform and vigilance...Its' sins are many but so are its virtues." We might say our citizenship in the kingdom of God needs constant reform and vigilance, that is to say a tension and priority. Jesus himself foretells about this Kingdom and about a time when the King of Glory will say, "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," and he will also say, "Truly I tell you just as you did not do it to one of the least of these you did not do it to me."

You can see not only because of what's happening in the world or in our nation but also in our own lives that we need Christ's reign to dawn right now. Of course we'll find Christ in whatever place - in whatever moment - we share when we're working for justice when sharing and giving ourselves away. That's the gist of what Jesus says today. In contrast, where they're not found we'll likely encounter human self-will which in personal terms I think emerges as a kind of self-centeredness; in social terms as oppression.

The Feast of Christ the King is Jesus himself showing us how to live and how to exercise human will. Honestly, I think that's so much of what my friend Larry was doing with his memoir. Desiring to show his loved ones something about how to live, how to be human, even citizens. All of us are working together right now, praying together, doing whatever we can together to make the world a better place, and it's a challenge for sure. It's also our god-given call. So on this day, Christ the King, imagine Jesus showing himself to us with such attractiveness that yourself will and mine, seeing themselves for what they are, will choose the way of the Cross to be the way of life. In that moment Jesus shall reign.