

Christ the King Sunday. - What Kind of King Is This?

Can you feel the unease in the air? Nationalism is rising. Nationalism is the belief My Country First. My Country is the Best. My Country Reigns. My Country at the sacrifice of all other countries.

Can you feel the unease in the air? Authoritarianism is rising. Authoritarianism is a country having one central authority, ruler, or party. Power is concentrated by appeals to emotions and identification of the regime as a necessary evil to combat easily recognizable societal problems like a rebellion, the economy, or jobs.

Can you feel the unease in the air? Fascism is rising. Fascist ideology takes nationalism to the extreme - My Country First now also includes My Country's Dominate race, culture, beliefs, and genetics first. And my country's ruler is the best. Fascist use violence to enforce order.

Can you feel the unease in the air? Wealth inequality is rising! The worlds the rich and the poor live in are so far removed they cannot even comprehend one another.

Can you feel the unease?!

The date is 1925. We felt the unease. The War to End All Wars had ended. But after all the celebrations and peace... unease has risen again in just a few years.

Maybe it didn't ever really leave.

In January, Benito Mussolini spoke in the Italian Chamber of Deputies. In this pivotal speech, he dropped all pretenses of being the lead of a democracy. Now Italy openly became a dictatorship with one-party rule, one leader, and following a new style of government Mussolini designed called 'Fascism.' Violence is good in fascism. The military is used to enforce uniformity of the people - support of dear leader - and the suppression of those who are deemed not loyal enough, Italian enough, conformed enough.

In April, F. Scott Fitzgerald publishes the novel The Great Gatsby. He uses this to criticize the vapid, moral-less rich people he knows. And how the rich are above the law. He also heavily plagiarizes the writing from his wife Zelda's journals and bases a character on her. The rich prey on the poor. And men prey on women.

In July Adolf Hitler publishes volume 1 of Mein Kampf, "My Struggle," which he wrote in prison where he was serving time for an attempted coup inspired by Mussolini. In Hitler's book he describes how the world is threatened by Jews, who run businesses and governments and intend a world take over. This Jewish elite must be countered by a New Order he intends to create. In the new order, the government will know it is more humane to exterminate the weak – the sick, the poor, the different, the minority - than to nurse them along. With the inferior humans removed, there will be enough room, jobs, money and spouses for the superior humans. By fall he'll have formed the SS.

The following month, the Ku Klux Klan holds a parade of 35,000 Klan members in Washington DC. This year the USA will take the sacred Six Grandfathers Mount from the Lakota, to carve it to become the white faces of their oppressors. We call it Mount Rushmore now.

And finally, in December, a new feast day is announced: Christ the King.

Pope Pius XI begins the holiday to counter the unease. To him, we all just need a little more Jesus. Specifically, we need to remember our allegiance isn't to this king or that nation, this dictator or that race - we are sworn to Jesus. Pope Pius quoted the church father Cyril of Alexandria, who wrote:

Christ "has dominion over all creatures, a dominion not seized by violence nor usurped, but by his essence and by nature. His kingship is founded upon the hypostatic union." That is, Jesus is king because he is wholly human and wholly divine. "From this it follows not only that Christ is to be adored by angels and men, but that, to him, as man, angels and men are subject, and must recognize his empire; by reason of the hypostatic union Christ has power over all creatures." Jesus rules because he is human AND divine. And he rules not by violence or theft. He rules because he, alone, has the qualities that make him appropriate to rule the seen and unseen world.

The Pope was also making a statement that Mussolini may have marched on Rome and conquered it, but that did not mean Mussolini was now in charge of the Roman Catholic Church.

Jesus is.

Although this started as a Catholic holiday, it was fairly quickly adopted by most Christian denominations. We all agree we need some more Jesus! We serve not a fallible, sinful, human king but a divine king who yet knows what it is to be human.

But what kind of king is Jesus?

That... depends on which Christian you ask.

Some honour Christ the King, or the Reign of Christ, day by seeing in Christ world peace. We're following a king who, when offered all the world's riches, said no. We're following a king who could have used his power to save himself, but chose not to. We're following a king who, even when dying, forgave his murderers and did not seek revenge.

A humble king.

A donkey-riding king. Not a war horse.

A crucified king, lifted up not on a throne but on a cross.

A king of mercy, humility, servant leadership. A king that says pray for those who persecute you and love your enemies ... a lamb.

But that king doesn't sit right with everyone. Not all want to think of Jesus this way. Others view today as the day to know the warrior Jesus. The Jesus of Revelation that comes riding in the clouds with thunder and judgement. The Jesus who kicks bottoms and takes names. A table-tossing, sword wielding, stoically dying and rising to return with a vengeance Jesus. A macho, cool, lion of a man.

Jesus, who comes with trumpets of war, and who unleashes the horses of the apocalypse, and who is covered in blood that makes one clean, acceptable, worthy.

A victorious king.

A king of majesty, perfection, and glory. A conquering Christ who leads a holy army, the lord of hosts, and ready to powerfully right wrongs.

... Both of these Jesuses are biblical. You'll find support for both in scripture.

Both are traditional. You'll find churches and denominations that have gone on crusades to kill non-Christians or those who are not my type of Christian. You'll find churches and denominations that have chosen to not be violent, even if it means being fed to lions or drowned in rivers by other Christians.

You'll find churches fighting injustice with Jesus as their warrior guide.

You'll find churches asking for prayers and not action with Jesus as their example of passive in the face of violence.

So all these understandings of Jesus are Biblical. Are they Christ-like? ... I think that depends on who Christ is to you. Whether Jesus is the ruler of a kingdom, with hierarchy and order, heaven and hell, punishment and wrath -- or Jesus is the one who establishes a kin-dom, with equality and equity, diversity and inclusion, forgiveness and forbearance – whether Jesus wants us to be prayer warriors or social justice warriors or to set down arms all together – even whether we call this day the kingdom or kin-dom says much more about who we are than who Jesus is.

Who is your Jesus?

Who is your king?

What does this say about your hopes?

Your fears?

Your dreams?

Can you feel the unease in the air?

The date is 25. Rome is taking greater and greater authority away from the people and religion. The rich and famous are above the law – wife swapping for political advantage and murdering the prophets, the truth speakers, they don't like. Herod rides in yearly with his warrior horse and makes a show of issuing judgements, mercy, and vengeance. Crosses – capital punishment to strike fear and hurt morale – dot the countryside. Within 5 to 7 years from now, Jesus will be murdered on one of these. Can you feel the unease? Ancient Israel will eventually rebel, and be destroyed by Rome. But now there is unease. And there is a young prophet, truth speaker named Jesus. He is a priest, not ordained by people but by the Holy Spirit. And he is a king – not “of the Jews” as he'll be charged with, but king of the universe.

Each person who encounters him directly or indirectly are asked – who are you seeking?

Jesus asks his disciples this – and they tell him he is John the Baptist reincarnated; or Elijah returned; or one of the prophets. “But who do YOU say that I am?”

And Simon Peter answers, “You are the Christ, the son of the living God.”

And Jesus said, “Blessed are you.”

We find who we seek.

Later, soldiers come with Judas. Jesus asks them who they are seeking.

The soldiers said, “Jesus of Nazareth”

“I am he,” said Jesus.

We find who we seek.

Pilate asked, “Are you king of the Jews?”

Jesus replied, “Who asks? You or someone else?”

Pilate asks, “Am I a Jew? Your people handed you to me. What have you done?”

Jesus replied, “My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest. My kingdom is not of this realm.”

Pilate concludes, “Ah ha! You are a king!”

Jesus answers, “You say so. I say I am here to testify to truth.”

“What is truth?” Pilate asks.

Pilate declares Jesus is a self-appointed king. And he is killed for insurrection.

We find who we seek.

So, who do you seek? What kind of king?

And what do you seek? A peaceful realm where we are all kin – all family? A kin-dom?

Or a peaceful realm where we are all uniform – obedient to a king? A kingdom?

Perhaps something different than these, or a combination.

Jesus tells us seek and we shall find.

Ask and it will be given to us.

Knock and the door shall be opened.

May we consider this Reign of Christ Sunday just what we're seeking, asking for, and hoping to enter.

Amen.

Scripture Readings – Nov. 23, 2025 – for LCUCPC

Jeremiah 23: 1-6

Restoration after Exile

23 Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! says the LORD. ²Therefore thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, concerning the shepherds who shepherd my people: It is you who have scattered my flock and have driven them away, and you have not attended to them. So I will attend to you for your evil doings, says the LORD. ³Then I myself will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the lands where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply. ⁴I will raise up shepherds over them who will shepherd them, and they shall no longer fear or be dismayed, nor shall any be missing, says the LORD.

The Righteous Branch of David

⁵The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. ⁶In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will live in safety. And this is the name by which he will be called: "The LORD is our righteousness."

Luke 23: 33-43

³³When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. [[³⁴Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."]] And they cast lots to divide his clothing. ³⁵And the people stood by watching, but the leaders scoffed at him, saying, "He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!" ³⁶The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine ³⁷and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!" ³⁸There was also an inscription over him, "This is the King of the Jews."

³⁹One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, "Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!" ⁴⁰But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?" ⁴¹And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong." ⁴²Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come in your kingdom." ⁴³He replied, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise."

May God's spirit shape our understanding of these words.

And may they awaken in our hearts.

