

JOB POSTING: KING OF THE UNIVERSE
CHRIST THE KING – NOVEMBER 24, 2019
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Today is Christ the King Sunday, and it's relatively new on our church calendar, less than 100 years old.¹ In dog years, that's 700 years ago.

In church years, that's day before yesterday.

Its placement on the last Sunday of the church year is to emphasize that Jesus Christ is both the beginning and the end our hope:

next Sunday is the first Sunday in Advent, the season when we anticipate

not only the birth of Jesus into human time, but the end of time itself, when, as our Creed puts it,

Jesus will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

One of the problems for us Americans on Christ the King Sunday is that we know bupkis about kings.

The last one we had to deal with was George III,² with whom we went to war.

Snide political jokes aside, the United States of America has been free of monarchs since 1783.³

So, here we citizens of a democracy are, in church, talking about the King of the Universe.

Never mind that normal everyday peons like us don't get to be king-makers,

and never mind, either, that there isn't a job opening for King of the Universe,

if you had to write a job posting, a classified ad, for the position,

what would you put in there as qualifications?

Where would we start? What kind of monarch would we seek?

I'm not galloping off into politics; this is a theological question –

perhaps the most important theological question we'll ever answer.

Because, as the Franciscans put it, "What you seek is what you are."⁴

So, what do we seek in the King of the Universe? Our answer tells us who we are.

Who are we? What kind of God do we think God should be?

Because if God is our King and rules us,

the kind of God we seek indicates what WE ourselves think WE should be.

To answer that, we need to be clear about what our desired goal is,

what we hope the final culmination of all history will be.

That will tell us what qualifications we need to put in our job posting.

Remarkably, there are all kinds of possibilities that we can justify with this Bible passage or that one.

In the Revelation to John, the end comes after an epic military battle,

when scavenging birds gorge themselves on all human flesh.

Is that what we want to put in the job posting?

"Candidate must be able to slay the unworthy,

*the flesh of all, both free and slave, both small and great.*⁵

This ability to slay EVERYONE in one battle was the height of awesome power 2,000 years ago.

Many religious people sought this power.

Bishops had armies that rode out to slay enemies in God's name;

kings by the dozen claimed God's sanction for wiping out enemy cities.

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Feast_of_Christ_the_King

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_III_of_the_United_Kingdom

³ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Treaty_of_Paris_\(1783\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Treaty_of_Paris_(1783))

⁴ Richard Rohr, "Oneness," CAC Meditation Sept. 27, 2019.

<https://cac.org/what-you-see-is-what-you-are-2019-09-27/>

⁵ The Revelation to John, Chapter 19.

If what we seek is what we are, there is a pretty solid argument
that humanity sought to be the ones capable of wiping out the flesh of all,
AND we've achieved it; we now can do it with the push of a few buttons.
It would all be over in less than a day.

God is no more powerful at making the earth melt than we are.
Since we can do that job ourselves, we don't need a King of the Universe for that.
What do we need a King of the Universe for?

Remember, how we answer that is also saying what WE want to be.
In Jeremiah, the prophet gives us another possibility besides a blood bath.
Instead of someone who rains terror and destruction,
our divine King is portrayed as a wise, attentive and caring shepherd
who finds the lost sheep, gathers them all, to give them secure pasture and a lasting peace.

But, why? Why does our divine king do this for his sheep?
Because these particular sheep had proven somehow to be especially worthy?
It is this notion of earned worthiness that has been the foundation
of human misery for thousands and thousands of years.

It pits us against each other as we scabble and claw our individual way
to being deemed worthy, stepping on anyone obstructing our path.

Achieved worthiness is competitive: if you win, I lose.

I don't like to lose. Bet you don't, either.

What if the wise, attentive and caring shepherd king doesn't care about worthiness,
what if he finds the lost sheep, gathers them, and gives them a secure and lasting peace
simply because the shepherd loves the sheep to death

What if their worth is in the eyes and heart of the shepherd who created them,
not in any achievements the sheep might have attained . . . if sheep even do that.

That's the message of the Gospel passage, isn't it?

There was nothing worthy about that criminal being crucified with Jesus.

He admitted his guilt and that he deserved punishment for his crime.

Yet, Jesus said that this man would be with him in paradise -
literally, paradise means "a walled garden," a secure pasture.⁶

What if this promise of paradise wasn't made to just one man, not even to all humanity,
but to all of creation? What if God doesn't love us just to death, but to life, too?

The Franciscan theology of creation teaches us⁷

that God's first incarnation was not as a human being, but as creation itself.

God has, from the beginning, made divinity visible, shareable, touchable.

Colossians says this first incarnation of God the Son shows in and through whom
all physical beingness is and was and will be created.

Indeed, God didn't create just once, God is still creating now.

The beingness of the universe, its physical manifestation,

IS the fullness of God, and we live in that God, that Son.

Just like every other person, creature and thing ever created,

we are very intentional and beloved expressions of God's creativity.

There are bazillions of expressions of incarnation, and God's not done!

⁶ <https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=paradise>

⁷ Richard Rohr, "God's First Idea," CAC Meditation Feb. 17, 2019
<https://cac.org/gods-first-idea-2019-02-17/>

In a few weeks, we will celebrate a particular moment in time when God's fullness, God's visible, shareable, touchable divinity took human shape in a wee bairn.

This incarnation as a human is a wonderful, beautiful and life-affirming, as well as the complete expression of what human relationships with God and each other are supposed to be like.

God's coming to us in Jesus was a complete pouring out of divine love,⁸ whose whole purpose is to draw us into the life of God.

Love does not demand our worthiness;

love does not require that we earn our way into the good graces of God.

Paul rejoices in this in the letter to the Colossians.

Note, please, that every verb in that letter is a declaration of what already is true, not a promise of what we'll get if we straighten up and fly right.

Through the blood of the cross – through God loving us to death, even though we absolutely did not deserve it –

God in Christ pulled us out of darkness, brought us into God's kingdom, not by and by after we die, but already, now.

In Christ, God has already set us free, has already forgiven our sins.

What's our sin? If what we seek is what we are, our sin is seeking something besides what we were created to be.

We weren't created to be violent, destructive, individualistic users.

God created us to be in relationships of mutual care and self-giving love.

That's what Jesus, the primary exemplar of human incarnation, was like when he lived among us: the King of Love, the Good Shepherd, and all those things we'll be singing about in just a few weeks.

King of kings, Lord of lords, the Wonderful Counselor, Almighty God, Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace:

If this is all true, maybe I need to be just a little bit political.

Of course, I do not in any way desire the return of human monarchies, but we need to find earthly leaders who are people of vision and integrity.⁹

Speaking of which, last week I heard Sheriff Gualtieri speak.¹⁰

He told us his wife called him to ask him how to get out of a speeding ticket.

He told her, "The way to get out of a speeding ticket is to get your foot off the accelerator."

Even with fine people like the sheriff serving us,

with all my heart I yearn for the day when Christ will rule all in all.

Until then, if Christ is my King, then I should do my best to live as he lived, to do as he taught, not to make myself worthy, but to become who God created me to be, to be in Christ; or, at the very least, not be at odds with Christ the King's goal.

⁸ Richard Rohr, "To Live Lightly," CAC Meditation Feb. Oct. 2, 2019; <https://cac.org/to-live-lightly-2019-10-02/>

⁹ Richard Rohr, "The Embodiment of Christ," CAC Meditations, Nov. 18, 2019. <https://cac.org/the-embodiment-of-gods-love-2019-11-18/>

¹⁰ Presentation at the Dunedin Council of Organizations meeting of November 15, 2019, Dunedin Golf Club, Dunedin FL.

What is that goal? What is the vision, the dream of God for Creation?

A contemporary theologian teaches that it is

*a world made whole, with people living in a beloved community,
where no one is despised or forgotten, peace reigns,
and the goodness of God's creation is treasured and protected as a gift.*¹¹

But this is not a new teaching! Our Jewish forbears have taught this goal and desire of God for millennia:

God's project is the *tikkun olam*, the healing of creation.¹²

It's the Holy Spirit's work, the word spoken through the Prophets.

If what we seek is what we are, we need to seek wisely so that the Lord is indeed our righteousness.

Only in the **Lord's** righteousness and justice

are we able to use the freedom God gives us to serve God's vision.

I'd like us now to stand and pray again, together, the Collect of the Day.

COLLECT OF THE DAY

O God, our true life, to serve you is freedom, and to know you is unending joy. We worship you, we glorify you, we give thanks to you for your great glory. Abide with us, reign in us, and make this world into a fit habitation for your divine majesty, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

JEREMIAH 23:1-6

Watch out, you shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture, declares the Lord. This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, proclaims about the shepherds who "tend to" my people: You are the ones who have scattered my flock and driven them away. You haven't attended to their needs, so I will take revenge on you for the terrible things you have done to them, declares the LORD. I myself will gather the few remaining sheep from all the countries where I have driven them. I will bring them back to their pasture, and they will be fruitful and multiply. I will place over them shepherds who care for them. Then they will no longer be afraid or dread harm, nor will any be missing, declares the LORD.

The time is coming, declares the Lord, when I will raise up a righteous descendant from David's line, and he will rule as a wise king. He will do what is just and right in the land. During his lifetime, Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. And his name will be The LORD Is Our Righteousness.

PSALM 46

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

**Therefore we will not fear, though the earth be moved,
and though the mountains be toppled into the depths of the sea;**

Though its waters rage and foam, and though the mountains tremble at its tumult.

The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our stronghold.

There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High.

God is in the midst of her; she shall not be overthrown; God shall help her at the break of day.

The nations make much ado, and the kingdoms are shaken;

God has spoken, and the earth shall melt away.

The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our stronghold.

Come now and look upon the works of the LORD, what awesome things he has done on earth.

**It is he who makes war to cease in all the world; he breaks the bow,
and shatters the spear, and burns the shields with fire.**

"Be still, then, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations; I will be exalted in the earth."

¹¹Wes Granberg-Michaelson, "From Mysticism to Politics," "Politics and Religion," *Oneing*, vol. 5, no. 2 (Center for Action and Contemplation: 2017), 17.

¹²https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tikkun_olam

☞ The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our stronghold.

COLOSSIANS 1:11-20

May you be strengthened through his glorious might so that you endure everything and have patience; and by giving thanks with joy to the Father. He made it so you could take part in the inheritance, in light granted to God's holy people. He rescued us from the control of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of the Son he loves. He set us free through the Son and forgave our sins.

The Son is the image of the invisible God, the one who is first over all creation, because all things were created by him: both in the heavens and on the earth, the things that are visible and the things that are invisible. Whether they are thrones or powers, or rulers or authorities, all things were created through him and for him. He existed before all things, and all things are held together in him. He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the one who is firstborn from among the dead so that he might occupy the first place in everything. Because all the fullness of God was pleased to live in him, and he reconciled all things to himself through him—whether things on earth or in the heavens. He brought peace through the blood of his cross.

LUKE 23:33-43

When they arrived at the place called The Skull, they crucified him, along with the criminals, one on his right and the other on his left. Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they're doing." They drew lots as a way of dividing up his clothing.

The people were standing around watching, but the leaders sneered at him, saying, "He saved others. Let him save himself if he really is the Christ sent from God, the chosen one."

The soldiers also mocked him. They came up to him, offering him sour wine and saying, "If you really are the king of the Jews, save yourself." Above his head was a notice of the formal charge against him. It read "This is the king of the Jews."

One of the criminals hanging next to Jesus insulted him: "Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!"

Responding, the other criminal spoke harshly to him, "Don't you fear God, seeing that you've also been sentenced to die? We are rightly condemned, for we are receiving the appropriate sentence for what we did. But this man has done nothing wrong."

Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Jesus replied, "I assure you that today you will be with me in paradise."

SERMON HYMN: *The King of Love My Shepherd Is*

BLESSING:

Deep peace of the running wave to you.

Deep peace of the flowing air to you.

Deep peace of the quiet earth to you.

Deep peace of the shining stars to you.

Deep peace of the love of God to you.

The blessing of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit be with you, Now and forever.