



*Guest Preacher: The Reverend Brock Baker*

November 21, 2021: Holy Eucharist Rite II for the Fourth Sunday of Advent

The Reverend Brock Baker

Christ Episcopal Church, Needham, MA

“Dear God, Our Father who loves us to the end, we come before you this morning, asking humbly for your blessings on each of us and all of us, who are gathered here together to honor you on your Day, the Lord’s Day, with our minds and bodies and spirits, by our service of love and obedience. We pray these things in the power of the Holy Spirit and in the name of your Son. Amen.”

Good morning. I am the Rev. Brock Baker canonically resident in the diocese of Albany and a licensed priest in the diocese of Massachusetts. It is an honor to be here with you and to be given the opportunity to address a few words to you on this special day in the church calendar, “Christ the King Sunday.”

However, for the purposes of what I want to say I am temporarily renaming it the “Kingship of Christ” Sunday. I do this not because Kings aren’t a widespread phenomenon today nor that only a very few people are longing for them. I do it because it allows me to concentrate on the theme of the Kingdom of Heaven or the Reign of Christ, which mean the same thing.

What does the Kingship of Christ mean for us then: First, it is not outside, above, or only in the past or in the future; it is found inside us. “The Kingdom of God is within you,” Jesus says in Luke 17: 20-21 by which he means, among other things, as we hear in John, that his kingdom is not “of this world” --it is not material or political.

Second, the Kingdom is inclusive: no “human person” is ever shut out from the throne room of Christ the King, where he sits as the right hand of God. The doors are always open, and there is no entrance requirement—not of wealth or worldly wisdom; of beauty of face or wholeness of body, or “status” or reputation or anything else, except our humanity, our humanness—and one more thing: our humility. Therefore, as we read in the letter to the Hebrews, 4:16:

“Let us .... approach the throne of grace with boldness.”

Third, we are expected, our welcome is pre prepared, the King even stands at the door to greet us personally the moment we arrive; or is at the end of the driveway, as was the father in the parable of the prodigal son, craning his neck for the first possible glimpse of his wayward and unhappy son or daughter as they turn away from their self-destructive lives and know they need help just to eat regularly, and find when they turn to him, new and fruitful lives in the company of their loving father, Our Father Who Art in Heaven, who is our father too.

Another picture of the Kingship of Christ is quite different: There is a trembling of the knees, and an invocation of reverent fear, or awe, at his “mightiness.” Listen to this from the Book of Daniel Chapter 7 our alternate reading for today, where the Apocalyptic vision of the Second Coming finds its earliest chronological expression.

“As I watched ... I saw one like a human being/coming with the clouds of heaven. And he came to the Ancient One and was presented before him. To him was given dominion/and glory and kingship, that



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all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall never pass away, and his kingship is one that will never be destroyed.”

And here is this same picture from Revelation 1: 4 , which we did read, written several centuries later than the Book of Daniel, with Jesus’ life, death, resurrection and ascension coming between them.

“Look! He is coming with the clouds/ every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and on his account all the tribes of the earth will wail. So it is to be.”

These passages from the Book of Daniel and Revelation for me are full of trumpet blasts, and gold and precious stones, and the “white as snow” of the clothes Jesus wore in his Transfiguration, and a fiery warmth that never burns but illuminates; but also, in Revelation, the single verse ~“every eye will see him/even those who pierced him”~that calls me to a different place and mood, a different experience of the Kingship of Jesus; namely, the Crucifixion and my part in it. Through the lens of the Second Coming, of Christ coming in Glory, we are invited in the midst of the triumph of the Second Coming to recall and dwell upon, in the words of Isaac Watts, “The wondrous Cross on which the Prince of Glory died.” Amid the triumph of the trumpet blasts Here is vulnerability—a man naked in the sight of all—here is pain: nail’s driven into hands and feet, the body slowly broken by its own weight—here is love exceeding all bounds~“Forgive them Father, for they know not what they do.”

Here is yet another picture of the Kingship of Christ, the “still point of the turning world”, the beginning and the end of all things, “the Alpha and the Omega...who is and was and is to come, the Almighty,” the great “I am.”

A contemporary African American theologian describing a church service of Christ the King in her childhood reminds us that this day is intended to be a day of dissonance not sweets harmonies. The choir would start singing with gusto a hymn with the refrain: “King of kings and Lord Almighty” and then answer softly with another refrain: “Poor little Mary’s baby.”

The Christ child born in a manger: Here is another revelation, certainly, as outstanding as the public event of the Crucifixion and the coming universal event of the Second Coming, but it is quiet, private, domestic, and yet each revelation, different as they are, contains all the others inside them, like a set of Russian boxes.

We will reach that story at the end of Advent, and yet all three, need to be kept together, even as we wait.

During this Advent Season I invite all of us to reflect upon and seek to experience all three revelations of the Kingship of Jesus: It is all of them together that make up the “truth” which Jesus refers to in his trial before Pilate in our gospel passage. The truth Pilate cannot or is unwilling to understand because it is gibberish to him, but for those who are called to the Supper of the Lamb, they are the Word of eternal life : “Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.”



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The “voice” of Incarnation as the tender care of Mary and the babe; the “voice” of the Crucifixion as the sorrow, pity, shame and renewal of Christ’s passion on the cross and resurrection to eternal life; and the “voice” of the Second Coming as the unshakable safety and healing that it guarantees to us starting in our present, here and now.: it is “the moment that makes sense out of all our moments.”

And how do we all this in the weeks ahead? We pray. We pray and ask God to help us to slow down, reflect, and always, in the end to act, to realize the kingdom in this world that Jesus established by his death on the cross. . Let each of us pray now to help us get started:

Let us pray: Almighty God, the Alpha and Omega, who is and was and is to come, help me by your Holy Spirit, who gave to John on Patmos those words of encouragement and inspiration, of certitude and security, that you are indeed coming in the clouds, at your glorious Second Coming, to bring justice and healing, to complete the work you are doing now in the world and doing in me, “to make all things new,” help me to take new heart, be filled again with new hopefulness and new wisdom and the will to do join you in your labors, starting today, right here and right now, and in the days to come. We pray all these things in the precious name of your Son, Jesus. **Amen.**