

Pastor Roy's sermon from November 20, 2016 (Christ The King Sunday)

Who do you want for a king? Someone who is like you? Someone who is different from you? Someone who is fair? Someone who looks out for the weak? In the Old Testament, the metaphor for king was shepherd. Everything a good shepherd does, a good king will also do. But in this Hebrew bible, all those who have power and resources, not just kings, are to use them as a good shepherd would to the betterment of society. When the prophets cry out for justice, they are not talking about catching the bad guys and exacting revenge, sure there are enough rules and penalties in the law. The justice of the prophets is about wisely sharing resources, making it possible for everyone to work and have food and shelter for their families.

Jesus was a shepherd King, but his kingdom was a kingdom of peasants. The people who followed him had little power. The people who had the power, who had the money and influence, they rejected him. His teachings threatened their lifestyles, even their take on faith and politics.

And so he ends up on a cross between insurrectionists. And then he dies. His followers are crushed by yet another disappointment. The powerful have put them down yet again.

But then Jesus their Messiah is raised—he is not dead, he is alive. His aliveness as one who walks and talks and eats fades into unity with God. Not a God of power, but the mercy of all that is—a good creation, a good universe.

Jesus preached about sharing and loving and caring, not because we're supposed to do those things, but because that is the way things are. To the extent that we keep too much for ourselves, and do **not** care for creation, we are out of touch with creation, we are out of touch with the divine mercy. To deny justice and mercy is to be anti-christ. To cling is to desperately hold an ice cube on a hot day. To resist mercy is to cut oneself off from mercy.

Jesus dies alongside those who have been given the death sentence. His only crime is that he did not defend himself from the accusations of the powerful. His crime was to defend the weak, the poor, the sick, the lost, the sinful, the disabled, women, and foreigners—the scapegoats of every society throughout time. He was not afraid to live faithfully. Jesus knew that the justice of God is the essence and source of life.

The salvation we find in the gospels is a salvation *from* ourselves, a salvation by relationship. Relationship with God, in God's mercy, with God's people. Here is our king who teaches us to live in love—to release our grasp on our lostness—to allow our fears to fall into the mercy of God.

We are Christians. Our true king is Jesus, lover of peasants and the powerful.

On good days, we choose his love. On not so good days, we stumble into his love. But either way, we receive mercy regardless of our ability to show mercy. That is the way things are. That is the way of our Creator.

Christ the King and Thanksgiving: It is appropriate that we celebrate Christ our King adjacent to Thanksgiving. Christ's reign fills us with gratitude. Oh, of course, sometimes we feel the gratitude more than other times. That is part of the ebb and tide of our lives. But we are part of a beautiful, merciful creation, filled with gifts of the Creator. We have much for which to be grateful.

Jesus Christ is our compassionate king. His reign is one of mercy and peace. He lived the reign of God's mercy in his choices, in his words, in his relationships. May we do so as well with greater courage as these days pass. Thanks be to God. Amen.