

Epworth Chapel on the Green
November 25, 2018
Christ the King
Rev. Dr. Brook Thelander

Daniel 7:9-14
Psalm 93
Colossians 1:11-20
John 18:33-37

Today is a transitional Sunday in the life of the Church. Next Sunday Advent begins, and during the season of Advent we will have a dual focus. On the one hand, we will focus on Christ's coming (Advent) as a human being born in a manger. At the same time, we will also focus on Christ's coming (Advent) as Risen Lord to judge the world and inaugurate the Kingdom of God in its fullness.

Today culminates the Christian year with a focus on Jesus as King -- not only as King of the world, but also as the King of Creation and Ruler over all that is. This day helps to prepare us to enter the season of Advent by renewing and refining our vision of the person of Jesus Christ.

Focusing on Christ in this way is important and even necessary. In our age of pluralism, multiculturalism, secularism, and relativism, Christ is increasingly given the status of *one person among many* in the study of the history of religions.

He is affirmed as:

- * a good man
- * a noble and wise teacher
- * a great advocate for social justice
- * a prophetic voice in a cultural wasteland

- * a champion for the marginalized and the oppressed
- * a deeply spiritual man

He is touted as all of these things. But he is *not* affirmed as divine, and certainly not as the Author and Agent of Creation, or the pre-existent Son of God.

I'm reminded of C.S. Lewis and his struggle to determine the identity of Jesus and the credibility of the Christian faith. As he wrestled to understand the person of Jesus, Lewis read the New Testament and finally came to the conclusion -- based on Jesus' own words -- that Jesus was one of three things: He was either the Lord, a liar, or a lunatic.

A day like today is a good occasion for me to remind you that your eternal destiny hinges on the question C.S. Lewis asked, namely: "Who is Jesus?"

How you answer this question matters. And the sources of your information also matter. For centuries, the Church has believed and taught that the Sacred Scriptures reveal accurately to us *who Jesus is*. They show us a Jesus who is the divine Son of God, who came as a man to redeem men and women, who died as a sacrificial offering for our sins, who rose again so that we might be raised up to newness of life, and who will come again in glory to judge the earth and to inaugurate God's Reign forever.

The Scriptures show us One before whom *every* knee will bow, and every tongue will confess, One before whom every power broker and political egomaniac will fall prostrate on their faces in his presence.

More than 30 years ago, Connie and I were in a worship service in Lexington, Kentucky. We were singing the old hymn, “How Great Thou Art,” where the hymnwriter speaks indirectly about Jesus as the Agent of creation when he reflects on lofty mountain grandeur, forest glades, and when he sees the stars and hears the pealing of thunder, and recognizes it as the power of God on display.

While we were singing, something happened that I don’t believe I’ve ever witnessed since. A spirit of holy awe and reverence descended on all of us who were there. There was nothing contrived about it, and although it was profoundly emotional, there was no emotionalism. We all just had this sense that we were standing on holy ground.

In that moment, our friend John Niehof grabbed a microphone and, with tears streaming down his face, said to us: “I know that one day every knee will bow, and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord. But I am compelled not to wait. I must bow my knee and my heart and my life to Jesus right now.”

And with that, he fell to his knees, acknowledging what people through the centuries have claimed and experienced and acknowledged to be true: that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God. That Jesus is the King of Kings who will come

on the clouds in great glory, riding the winds of justice and rendering judgment to every person.

But the Scriptures show us more about Jesus than the One before whom every knee will bow. They show us One who is the embodiment of truth, so much so that he is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. According to Scripture, truth is not an abstract theory or proposition, but rather a *Person*.

The Scriptures show us One in whom *relationships* often take precedence over *rules*, One who *wept* over the city of Jerusalem and who *weeps* over the brokenness in our lives. They reveal to us One whose grace has remarkable power to restore life, especially when coupled with faith.

The Scriptures show us One who knows us better than we know ourselves, and yet whose love for us is as steady as the day is long. One who has gone to the uttermost lengths to bring us back to the Father.

Yes, the question, “Who is Jesus?” is an important one, to be sure. But we could bandy that question about all day today, and in the end it would merely be an intellectual exercise.

The more relevant question this morning is: “Who is Jesus -- to *you*?”

As we reflect on that question, he invites us to the Table. May this place be a place today where we gain a fresh vision of our Lord, and where the word “King” would penetrate down into the depths of our souls.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.