

Disciples Give Ultimate Allegiance to

Part 12 of Sermon Series:

What Disciples Do

a sermon based on

Colossians 1:11-20

and delivered on

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Christ the King Sunday (Year C)

at

Cherry Valley United Methodist Church

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Today, we conclude the sermon series, “What Disciples Do.” In a way, I think this gives a summary or a synopsis (I couldn’t decide on the right word.) of the whole concept of discipleship when we consider what it means for disciples to give ultimate allegiance to Jesus.

This is Christ the King Sunday. Some of you may have grown up never having heard of the day. There’s a good reason for that. It wasn’t an actual part of any church’s liturgical calendar until 1925 (less than a hundred years ago) when Pope Pius XI added it to the Roman Catholic calendar. Protestants – including Methodists – added Kingdomtide to their in 1937, and from 1939 until about 1983 with the participation in the Revised Common Lectionary – the Methodist Church and then The United Methodist Church recognized Kingdomtide for the entire second half of the period following Pentecost until Advent. That’s why you may remember having red paraments much more often in the past. Then, we too switched to recognizing Christ the King Sunday.

So what? Right? Why this history lesson on the church’s liturgical calendar?

The calendar is meant to bring us round and round to God’s story in our lives. It begins with anticipation in Advent, the Incarnation in Christmas, the awakening of Epiphany, the preparation of Lent, the resurrection joy of Easter, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, and that ordinary time of just living and living with God. It all concludes, today, with the celebration of Christ the King Sunday.

Today, we acknowledge that Jesus Christ is our king! We didn’t elect him or choose him. He chose us! For what? Why? He chose us for salvation and promise of a restored relationship with God the Father. He was so committed to claiming that promise for us that he went to the cross for our sake. Ultimately that’s what kings are supposed to do.

That may have been why it took until the 1920’s and 30’s for Christians to put this idea of Christ’s kingship on the calendar. The advent of democratic governments in secular society, started to affect how we understand our relationship to God, as if we get to choose who God is. There’s a serious flaw in that logic of choosing God. We can choose to obey or to trust, but we don’t get to choose God’s nature. God is who God is. And God revealed himself to us in Scripture as one deeply concerned for our well-being and our restoration as those who are made in his image.

A king is a leader; but a king is not like other leaders. Presidents and prime ministers – they are leaders that people select. They are responsible to a job. A true king, however, is not just a leader, but one who takes responsibility for his subjects. In Jesus we find such a king, not one who rules for the sake of his own glory, but who leads us to the realization of our full potential and who will defend us against any adversary – even to the point of his own death.

That’s the promise we claimed here today in the sacrament of baptism. As we rejoiced with Tucker and Bailey, and remember our own baptism, we are claiming Jesus Christ as king. We claim him trusting him to defend us against evil. That’s why so many of us fasted yesterday.

In our relationship to Jesus as king, we are invited to be disciples rather than subjects. That’s an important distinction to God’s kingdom over earthly realms. God doesn’t make demands but offers an invitation to follow. In his realm, we don’t get to vote on our demands, but instead we give ourselves to him trusting that he will lead us in a more fulfilling life and that he will defend us.

That’s what it was saying in that passage from Colossians that we heard today regarding Jesus. “He is the head of the body, the church, he is the beginning, the firstborn of the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything.” (Col. 1:19) We accept that he is first, not because he demands it, but because his death confirms his love for us. And so we have the invitation earlier in that passage, “May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light. (Col. 1:11-12) So, how does that happen?

I read a story, this week, about a teacher. She'd been cleaning her attic when she came across a crucifix. It was a wooden cross with a silver figure of Jesus on it. She took it and put it on her desk at home.

Her desk started to get cluttered. So, she moved the crucifix. She ended up sitting it on a pile of her bills and checkbook. And it made her wonder. "How does my faith impact my finances? Where I spend my money? Where I don't?"

As time went on and more items cluttered her desk, she moved the crucifix once again. This time it ended up on top of a pile of her students' assignments awaiting her grade. She thought now about how her faith affected her work. How does it affect how she treats her students? How does it affect how she interacts with her colleagues? And parent?

Again as time went on and she needed space on her desk, she moved the crucifix once again: this time onto a stack of personal photos. It got her thinking about how her faith affected her relationships. With her family? Her friends? Others?

As disciples, we give ultimate allegiance to Jesus when we put everything under him. We show our allegiance not reciting creeds or making a show of being in church. What does the Jesus say reflecting on the prophets? "I desire mercy not sacrifice" (Mt 9:13) Giving Jesus our ultimate allegiance means putting our whole trust in him and being attentive to how our lives reflect his promise and his glory.

Thinking of the news, this week, with the scandal in the British monarchy concerning Prince Andrew being asked to step down lest he embarrass the monarchy, I think it is fitting to consider how we live as Christians. Through Jesus Christ we are called heirs to the kingdom – that means we are all princes and princesses. What we do – how we live – affects how others see him.

Too many Christians worry about pushing everyone to obey their interpretation of God's law by imposing it on others. Yet God himself never imposes himself on us. Yet when we live lives under Christ others we present a new sort of witness to who this God is who so loved the world that he gave his only Son. (Jn 3:16)

Do this for a moment. Close your eyes. Imagine a pile of your bills and checkbook and credit cards. Now put a cross on top. How do your choices about money reflect Jesus' love?

Now, put that cross on top of your work, your tools the invoices, whatever it is? How does your behavior and diligence at work demonstrate Jesus' love in your life?

Now, put that cross on top of your family photos or since it's 2019 on top of your cellphone. How does your attentiveness to those in your live help them to discover how precious Jesus thinks they are?

Through baptism we have been claimed by God to be sons and daughter with Jesus Christ our King. He is our greatest defender, cheerleader and promoter. Let us give him our ultimate allegiance so that we can bask in his glory – and reflect his glory to the world. AMEN.