

**Lesson: Ephesians 1:15-23**  
**The Gospel: Matthew 25:31-46**

**Christ the King Sunday**  
**November 22, 2020**

**“Sparked by the Spirit – Christ is King!”**  
**Sermon Preached by Lowell D. Nelson**  
**American Lutheran Church of Sun City**

Welcome to American Lutheran Church in Sun City, Arizona! Thank you for joining us today. This is the weekend where we celebrate a simple and powerful message: “Christ is King!” We proclaim this often through the Lord’s Prayer: “For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever!” It is in the simple and beautiful statement that “Christ is King” that we complete our Pentecost journey of these twenty-five weeks we have spent together. We do it by bursting through the finish line and proclaim, “Christ is King!” He is #1 in our life and we give thanks to God.

Next week is our Thanksgiving celebration. I ask a blessing upon you and your family. Our on-line service will be a wonderful service with music, patriotism and a gift of God’s message of hope. And so I ask you to join us. As it’s an on-line service we won’t be gathered in our traditional way. Let us unite in giving our offerings, sending them in the mail or dropping them by the church. We need to take that extra step because every single dollar is raised for the benefit of the West Valley Food Pantry at St. John’s Lutheran Church.

Our appeal for 2021 offerings “Sparked by the Spirit,” has now begun. Our first mission is our mission to proclaim. I am so thankful for our music ministry here. Dr. James has joined us along with Janet MacDonald and George Zoske to proclaim this wonderful love of God through music. We now will hear a testimonial from our own members about the power of music to proclaim the love of God. Let us listen...

We are the Helms’ and the Schmidts’, commonly referred to as The Quartet. We joined American Lutheran Church last year and have been asked by the Stewardship Committee to tell you why we came. This is a primary reason... [The Quartet sings] “There’s a sweet, sweet spirit in this place and I know that it’s the spirit of the Lord. There are sweet expressions on each face and I know that it’s the presence of our Lord.” We have sung that song together at our church in Virginia for over 35 years. So when we moved out to Phoenix we knew we wanted to find a new Lutheran church home. We attended many, but one Sunday we found ourselves in a pew here next to Jane Brambilla; after church she made sure we were recruited into the choir. Janet had our names on our chairs when we arrived for practice!

But there’s more to a church than the music program. We were inspired by the words of Pastor Lowell and Pastors Judith and Gary. Every week there’s something from the pulpit that convinces us that we are indeed where God wants us to be. We have met and cherished so many members – the choir yes, but we also love the fellowship, the coffee and cookies after the services. God willing, we can get back to that. Another reason for our support is that we love the benevolence balance shown by ALC, in allocating resources to the synod, the Navajo Water Project, the food bank, and hiring top-notch leaders, most recently Dr. James Gerber, Organist and Worship Coordinator. If you haven’t yet surmised, we are all in for ALC!

## Pastor Lowell's Message

A simple proclamation: "Christ is King!" The word king denotes the power and authority of God. Of course, in our culture we don't use the term "king;" that's for other countries. We are the people who elect our leaders, but it still resonates; this simple word "king" that denotes the power and authority of God's love. The whole culmination of Pentecost has been a time to live "sparked by the spirit," to live in accordance with Christ's teaching and to engage in life.

Sometimes I think about Pentecost as such a long road, almost like a marathon for this past year. It's been 25 weeks, nearly half the church year, and as we move along the path of Pentecost sometimes, we can become tired. This year is a year of pandemic fatigue, all of us struggling with how to retain our sense of vitality and life. I think two things are true as we finish this race in the church year, so to speak. Whether we are bursting through the finish line or limping through the finish line, barely making it, we can all say together that "Christ is our King," the most important thing in our life, the orientation to life, the life of God through Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit encourages us to live in such a simple and profound way, where "Christ is King."

And so this emphasis is our rallying cry, proclaiming this beautiful message: "Sparked by the Spirit." This appeal for giving for 2021 denotes that our church proclaims through the gospel reading and the preaching. But today we highlight the gift of music. Dr. James Gerber joining our team is our investment for the future in this proclamation through music. I'm thankful for the legacy of music in this beautiful church, and we are committed to proclaim the love of God through the beauty of voice, songs, organ -- all the expressions of musical instruments including our dear bell choir, all the ways to proclaim this simple message that "Christ is King!"

The gospel reading for today is one that is difficult because it speaks of judgment. But judgment is not something to be feared; it is something to be in awe of. It is a sense of respect for God's authority and for God's will through Jesus Christ, to give us this love in the flesh. The Psalm says it this way: "Come, let us sing to the Lord. Let us shout for joy to the rock of our salvation." I'm going to ask you to consider this: to make your life more simple! I know that I can get bound up in plans and reviews and a multitude of actions. Some of that I suppose is helpful, but I'm talking about your faith life -- a simple, beautiful reliance upon Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ as Lord, Jesus Christ as King. This is how we sing to the Lord, this gift of Jesus Christ in our life.

The Ephesians text says it in a powerful way. Paul writes that he is so thankful for the people of Ephesus, and he says this: "I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the father of glory may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him." A spirit of wisdom and revelation -- this is what we have gained through our Pentecost experience: the wisdom of the scriptures, the wisdom of living life together, the wisdom of understanding the circumstances in which we live. All of our wisdom comes with the revelation that Jesus Christ is King. I'm reminded of a beautiful phrase "the eyes of our heart." (There's a wonderful contemporary song "Open the eyes of my heart, Lord. Open the eyes of my heart, I want to see you.")

There is this simple understanding: that we are called to understand the greatness of Christ's power, and to believe that He did this for us, to bring us into a point of hope and salvation. The love of God and this wisdom that we speak of is not just a request for an ethereal wisdom. We're not trying

to make things more difficult by being Christians; we are trying to make things profoundly simple. Pastor Mark Lee, formerly of a Fort Collins congregation, said it this way: “This wisdom is practical, flesh and blood; it’s a worldly affair, this wisdom.” I love that we hear the emphasis on a simple, profound faith to help those who are hungry. Yes, with prayer, but with food for those who are hungry. Yes, for a variety of support and encouragement, but to make sure the thirsty are hydrated; fresh and delicious water for the stranger, whoever that may be – strangers in your neighborhood, in our church, in our state, in our country. For those without clothing, to have the dignity of clothing that respects their life and lets them know that someone cares for them. The sick – This year has been beyond measure of understanding care of the sick. Thank you, God for the simple truth that nurses, doctors and allied health professionals have served with such strength and compassion. We all must continue to take care of people in need.

Throughout my life I’ve been involved with prison ministry. Here is a simple statement of truth: visit people in prison. It is simple; it’s uncomplicated and straightforward; that this life *with* Christ, this life *for* Christ is all about loving in the name of Christ. The added benefit is the dignity which we ourselves receive the love of God by seeing the face of Christ in the face of those we are serving. It is a powerful emphasis that Christ isn’t behind me, pushing me to serve people; Christ is in front of me – in the eyes and in the cries of people who need our help. He’s not pushing, He’s bidding us. That is the Pentecost story: “sparked by the spirit” we’re encouraged to live!

I encourage you to treat this as “bursting through the finish line.” (Now, I haven’t really accomplished that; in my track record I was pretty slow. I never ever burst through the finish line, being the first to hit the tape. Some of you may have had that experience.) But I’m talking about the finish line that each one of us has with the completion of this year; our journey with Christ is to burst through whatever race this has been for you. This triumphant claim, this straightforward, uncomplicated plain claim that “Jesus Christ is King” is power. Take the power and transform it into love.

I ask that the proclamation of the gospel continues in our church through music, through the spoken word, through our individual conversations, through your conversations over this upcoming Thanksgiving holiday -- all the ways we proclaim that “Christ is King.” Make your faith life utterly simple. I ask for that blessing upon my own life. About 75 years ago, C.S. Lewis wrote a book called Mere Christianity; I thought about that title when I was younger. I didn’t like that word ‘mere’, but from an English viewpoint, that can be translated into a ‘simple’ message of Christianity. “Christ is King!” I can see Christ every day by looking into your eyes and serving in His name you dear and precious people. It is as simple a message as we’d ever need in life. Proclaim it loud; burst through the finish line and enter into this new year confident of God’s grace. AMEN!