

**FIRST LESSON: Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14**  
**SECOND LESSON: Revelation 1:4b-8**  
**THE GOSPEL: John 18:33-37**

**Christ the King Sunday**  
**November 25, 2018**

**“Dedicated to a Higher Purpose”**  
**Sermon Preached by Pastor Lowell D. Nelson**  
**American Lutheran Church of Sun City**

Grace, peace and truth be to you through our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen

Christ the King Sunday is the last Sunday of the Pentecost season. Twenty-six weeks we have been journeying together on this life in the Spirit, the life with Christ, the life of Christian fellowship, and movement out into the world. I remember being a young preacher’s kid, asking my dad “How long is Pentecost?” it seemed like the 100<sup>th</sup> week after Pentecost, it seemed like it went on forever. It’s half the year. It is an important season for us, lots of different wonderful things over the spring, summer, and fall. But the simple truth is a very powerful and simple assertion – Jesus Christ is King of Kings, Lord of Lords, the most important thing to guide and amplify our life, it is an utter truth that Jesus Christ is Number 1. I struggle as a pastor to describe these words to people.

When I was a confirmation teacher I would say stuff like this, “The King of Kings” and I remember a confirmation student saying “But here in America we don’t like kings.” That is true, we don’t like kings, right from the very beginning, there was a certain King George that was not high on our list as Americans. So we struggle and we have a wonderful system of democratic republic so that we can vote and make our voices known. I am going to try to emphasize the absolute benefit of declaring that Christ is number one in your life during this message, to encourage you to keep that as your orientation to life so that no matter how life goes, in its ups and downs, and its great highs and great lows, it is emphasis upon your life and like others having Jesus Christ as the simple and most powerful orientation point in your life. Dare I say the North Star of your life so that you have this opportunity to be able to live and have the truth flowing through you fully.

The Daniel text, such beautiful languages to use to describe the combination of the Aramaic and Hebrew written in a way to bring forward this powerful image. The ancient one of days, take the father as we would use the words to understand this incredible power and blessing and the absolute awe and dignity of the court in which he sits, and then this movement before the ancient one, the son of man, a human being was presented before him. To him was given dominion, glory and kingship that all peoples, nations and languages should serve him. I always love this image as God moves throughout the world. Here in the United States we struggle with our Christian faith and it’s a mighty struggle, we are part of it. We are in a post Christendom society, and that’s okay with me because the Christian church flourishes when it is not part of the power structure, but it’s difficult for us who have seen the changes. But there is no doubt that many and all peoples and nations are being at least touched by this Christian message of the divinity and the rule of Jesus Christ. This will not pass away, this will continue, and fulfill Christ’s second coming.

In the Revelation text itself, again using language at the beginning of the book, the first chapter, “Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come.” This understanding that time is set aside and that all of life, the past, the present, the future is all within God’s care and concern. From the seven spirits, not so much an emphasis on seven different, but seven as a holy number, the Holy Spirit

where before his throne and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the first born of the dead, the ruler of the kings of the earth. You and I are realists, we understand that many people, whether king or queen or elected official do not understand the responsibility to the ruler of kings on the earth. This message of love, the new kingdom being brought in, but we have hope because we understand this. It is to be, it is, I am the alpha, the beginning, the omega, the end, who is and who was and who is to come. So no matter what happens in life, we have this orientation that Christ is number one.

The kingdom, as Jesus is our King, is an interesting thing to be a Christian. I remember receiving some advice that I will never, ever have to use. It was *what to do if you met a royal person*. I cannot forecast that, maybe God will bring that in my future, but it kind of goes this way, especially for, as I best understand the queen, don't stick out your hand. Respond to their lead. I remember thinking – oh good Lord, do not give a hug – right? Don't just come in, pick her up and give her a hug – disrespectful. But our Kingdom is a little bit more like that, we are called not so much in the formality of religion, but the authenticity – what does it mean that when Christ is my King, how do I respond to you? The response is – I love you, because the King loves you. So if I am following the King, I am going to, in the best efforts that I can, love you and to greet you. This is our kingdom, it has its own styles, it is certainly based on this love. I mean, the truth is, the world needs Christ as King and we are just so fortunate to be able to live this out.

I want to shift to the Gospel text itself. It is interesting for Christ the King to go all the way out of Matthew and Mark and move into John and to come to this powerful sequence of questions and answers. Pilot, representing the Roman authority, looking for an insurrection “Are you a king who will compete against our Roman authority? Are you king of the Jews, are you here to create a political problem for me?” And Jesus, in his unique style, answering in a way that makes the person asking the question have to answer. “Did you ask me if I am King of the Jews on your own or did others tell you about me?” Then Pilot saying, “I am not a Jew but what have you done?” In this beautiful interplay, “My kingdom is not of this world. For this I was born and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth, listens to my voice.”

The next verse that is not included in our reading for today is one that has been one of my most favorite ones to struggle with. Perhaps you remember that Pilot asked a simple question, it is not answered in the text, it is answered in our heart, it is answered in life, it's answered by each one of us. Yes, with the full support and power of the Holy Spirit, but it is answered individually for each one of us. This is the question – What is truth? Pilot asked that. I think it would have been helpful to me if there had been another discourse on truth, but the simple answer is that we live the truth. So I am going to proclaim the powerful truth that Jesus Christ is King, Jesus Christ is Lord. It is a truth statement, and I want to set up against an experience that I had where I believe that was a precursor to what I feel many people are struggling with.

Years ago I was in social work school learning how to be a better supporter of humans. I was coming off an IBM experience, so I needed to be more sensitive to people, of course in this training, the professors are trying to figure out how to motivate me and other students. They were concerned that people like myself, normal people, would come in and have solutions to people for their problems without respecting the dignity of each person. In saying that, as he was trying to teach, he said, “So the truth is, as you come in, the truth is this – there is no truth.” I think he was trying to be helpful, I wasn't quite so helpful back. As you get to know me, I remember evaluating – should I play or should I just let that go? I decided to get back into it. I don't agree with assertion, but how do I do that? I did it this way, “Professor, you said there is no truth, so based upon the assertion of your logic, I reject everything that you just said.” It was

a pass/fail course so I had a few grades to give up, just in case he was going to hold that against me. He hated that because he said, “No, no, no... this is the truth that there is no truth.” I said, “You can’t live that way. You can’t live with no truth.” Certainly we’ll concede that there are different view points on different actions and if there is an accident, and you have different witnesses, there will be different vantage points, I certainly will concede that, but that is not true that there is no truth.

We have a leader, a theological leader named Martin Luther who would hold onto these important things. Let me just go over the basics with you again. He had a beautiful phrase, “I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man born of the Virgin Mary is my Lord, who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned person. Purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver, but with his Holy precious blood and with his innocent suffering and death that I may be his own and live under him in his Kingdom and serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness, just as he is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity.”

Now for you who came up in the Lutheran tradition – do you remember this certain phrase that Luther would say at the end of his explanations? *This is most certainly true.* And for you who didn’t come up in that tradition, did you hear the joy in that discussion from each and every one who has gone through confirmation? This is most certainly true. It is meant to be one of the most joyous statements ever. What is this? Here’s the explanation – and this is most certainly true, I can live my life this way, I can focus my life, I know that in the midst of everything else, this is what is true.

I want to suggest to you that it is not a matter of the will, if it was a matter of the will, Luther wrote about that – the bondage of our will. It’s not a matter of trying harder, it is God’s never ending quest to bring us into this right relationship. Luther said it this way for the third article of the Creed, “I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him, but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith in the same way he calls and gathers and enlightens and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth.” Then it continues, “and keeps me with Jesus Christ in the one true faith, in this the Christian church he daily and richly forgives all my sins and sins of all believers and on the last day, the end of days, he will raise me up and all the dead and give eternal life to me and all believers in Christ.” He ends it with, “This is most certainly true.” This is the joy.

Yesterday after the sermon I had a dear person come to me and share a heart break in their life, which is they have a child who does not believe in Jesus as Lord. They are not alone. The phrase, nones – not the people in habits, but the nones, none of the aboves has tripled in the last 20 years. Especially for young people under the age of 30, it is moving to half the young people believe in none of the above, that’s where they are at. The reason was because of all the pain and suffering in the world. That’s what this one child was saying, “I can’t believe in a God with the pain and the suffering in this world.” The parent asked, “What should I do?” It breaks all of our hearts when our children are not following in the faith, but it is this beautiful insight that Luther talked about, it’s not our own will or our own assertion, but it is praying to the Holy Spirit. I just said it this way, “As I best understand it, do not give up on praying for the Holy Spirit to call your child, to gather your child, to enlighten your child, to bring your child into the truth through friends, through experiences, through your own life, through the beauty of life’s experiences, and where one is experiencing the distress of life, there is an anchor, a north star, a love that passes all understanding, and we will never ever ever give up because we know that the Kings Kingdom is forever and ever and ever. So don’t you ever give up, because God never gives up. That’s our King, the one we can trust and believe in.” I pray that was helpful to him and I know that encourages me to say that to you,

for your own prayer life, for anyone in your life, who you so deeply care for, that they will discover the truth, that is a wonderful way to encourage your family and your friends.

In conclusion for this part of the message, before I move into the Consecration element, it is the absolute benefit of having Christ as your King, as having the absolute truth in your life. God's love in Jesus Christ, shaping your life, forming your life, allowing you to make decisions. I teased a little about football scores and putting it in context, but when Christ allows your context to be seen and made clear in your life, there is a momentum and a power that is spirit driven that you are not going to be buffeted by the ways and the concerns of the world, you will be impacted as a minister of Christ but you will not be impacted as trying to find another substitute, something less than. I just ask you at the end of this Pentecost season, as we break through the finish line, now here we are, can you believe it, we move into the Advent cycle. The beauty of the Christmas season, the beauty of hope and peace, and joy and love, looking forward to Christ's second coming. This orientation to life just continues to grow.

I am so thankful to be with you now in this upcoming next sequence of the liturgical season, it is the absolute truth of love of Christ who calls us to make him number one, this is a gift of the Spirit and I pray that blessing upon your life.

I now move into Consecration. When you have Christ as number one, you can consecrate your life which means to dedicate to a higher purpose. Leading a consecrated life doesn't mean leading a perfect life, it means dedicated to a higher purpose which is the love of Jesus Christ. I had written the letter, and again I thank pastor Chuck for his guidance here. He was under duress when I came here and there were some economic challenges within the church, getting things in order, I like to move technical. I can move technically on financial issues, it was the gentle guidance of my older brother in Christ here, my partner in ministry, that this is a chance for spiritual renewal. This is the chance to reconnect with the basic relationship that in our pledging for 2019, whether you are a member here or have dual memberships, or a visitor, it does not matter. It is just a simple statement that all I have is from God and here is my heartfelt desire, no discounts needed. Here's my heartfelt desire to give back to you God and to put that on the card and it is kept in its envelope so that it is between you and God. I am going to pray over it periodically over the entire number of cards put together in their envelopes over the spring and summer season, and then we will figure out a cost effective way to return them to you. The idea is what a wonderful blessing to remember this deep connection that with Christ as King, everything – the way I act, the way I believe, the way I move, and the way I invest money into the Kingdom is a simple response to the King.

I am going to invite you, I think it makes sense that as I invite you to come forward, there are four baskets here, one for each section. If you start from the front, if you have your card is to move out to the right, place your card, and move back as Tom plays some music. Afterwards, I am going to gather them, place them there, and we are going to sing together a beautiful song of our pledging of our unity for this dedication to a higher purpose.

God, as we come forward, just use this time through the power of the Spirit to replenish our hearts, our confidence in you. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen