

**Davidson College Presbyterian Church
Davidson, NC
Mary Margaret Porter
"But Why?"
Colossians 1: 11-20
Christ The King
November 20, 2016**

I must preface this sermon with the note that I was not planning on mentioning the election this Sunday. Our college students did such an eloquent job thinking and wrestling with it last week and I for one am a little elected out. Well - - the Holy Spirit had other ideas as you will see.

Let us Pray – May the words of my mouth and the meditation of all of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord – our rock and our redeemer. Amen,

Our New Testament reading is from Paul’s letter to the church in Colossae. Colossians 1:11-20. Listen now for God’s word.

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. He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.

I am a ‘why’ person. As a child, my favorite words were “ but why.” I was in constant need of explanation for why things were the way they were, what we were doing or going to – but why? One of my teachers told my mother he would not even have finished answering my first question before the second would be out of my mouth. When confronted with my barrage of questions, my mother, as they often do, would simply say “because that is just the way it is” or my current favorite with my own children “because I said so.”

SLIDE 1

So this morning I wanted to speak to all my other ‘ but why’ brothers and sisters out there. Today is Christ the King Sunday and to be honest – every time this day comes up on the lectionary, I always wonder why and what it means. So I looked it up.

I am guessing that many of you, like me before I had the opportunity to study in seminary, thought very little of why a preacher preached from a particular text on a particular Sunday – other than during Christmas and Easter of course.

So how DO we pastors decide on what to preach on each Sunday and how today became “Christ the King” Sunday?

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In addition, Distinct liturgical colors often appear in connection with different seasons of the liturgical year. White for today, Christmas day, Easter Sunday and at funerals among others, purple in Advent and Lent and green for most of the rest of the year. Red is worn for Pentecost.

So today is the last Sunday of that annual calendar as a new Christian Year begins with the first day of Advent.

But Why do we call this Christ the King Sunday you may ask?

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This is a relatively recent addition to the Western liturgical calendar, having been instituted in 1925 by Pope Pius XI (**That guy – point to screen**) for the Roman Catholic Church and adopted by Protestants with the 1992 Revised Common Lectionary. Christ the King Sunday celebrates the all-embracing authority of Christ as King and Lord of all things. Officially called "The Feast of Our Lord Jesus Christ the King."

But Why did Pius begin This Feast in the First Place?

Pope Pius XI instituted the Feast of Christ the King in response to the growing secularism of his time. He connected the increasing denial of Christ as king to the rise of secularism throughout Europe. At the time, many Christians (including Catholics) began to doubt Christ's authority and existence, as well as the Church's power to continue Christ's authority.

Pius XI, and the rest of the Christian world, witnessed the rise of non-Christian dictatorships in Europe, and saw Catholics being taken in by these earthly leaders. For the Pope, the Feast of Christ the King was instituted during a time when he felt respect for Christ and the Church was waning, when the feast was needed most. Listen to what he wrote

"The seeds of discord sown far and wide; those bitter enmities and rivalries between nations, which still hinder so much the cause of peace; that insatiable greed which is so often hidden under a pretense of public spirit and patriotism, and gives rise to so many private quarrels; a blind and immoderate selfishness, making men and women seek nothing but their own comfort and advantage, and measure everything by these; no peace in the home, because men and women have forgotten or neglect their duty; the unity and stability of the family undermined; society in a word, shaken to its foundations and on the way to ruin."¹

Pious wanted to remind his flock on whose authority heaven and earth truly rested.

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But Why?

Jesus himself knew the often-oppressive nature of secular kings, and in contrast to them, he connected his role as king to humble service, and commanded his followers to be servants and disciples as well.

Jesus said:

"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

And he also said

You know that those who are recognized as rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones make their authority over them felt. But it shall not be so among you. Rather, whoever wishes to become great among you will be your servant; whoever wishes to be first among you will be the slave of all. **SLIDE 3** For the Son of Man

¹ Pope Pius XI, Quas Primas (On the Feast of Christ the King), Encyclical promulgated on 11 December, 1925, paragraph 24.

did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:42-45, NAB).

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In other passages of Scripture, his kingdom is tied to his suffering and death. While Christ is coming to judge the nations, his teachings spell out a kingdom of justice and judgment balanced with radical love, mercy, peace, and forgiveness. When we celebrate Christ as King, we are not celebrating an earthly ruler, but one willing to die for humanity and whose "loving-kindness endures forever." Christ is the king that gives us true freedom, freedom in Him. *Thus we must never forget that Christ radically redefined and transformed the concept of kingship.*

His authority didn't come in a way the people of Israel expected. Christ didn't come as an earthly king. "My kingdom is not of this world," Jesus tells Pilate. His kingdom is not of human origin, but of divine. It is not an earthly power. He was not going to overthrow Roman rule and establish an earthly, political realm. His kingdom is not one of swords and military or economic might. His sovereignty, his power, comes from bearing the truth. Being the truth and bearing witness to the truth, the truth of God's kingdom and its ways. The truth of salvation that does not and can not come from any earthly or human power. The truth of love, righteousness, and eternal life comes only from the Kingdom established by God in Christ.

And unlike our earthly rulers, elected or deemed so by our own culture and desires, Christ's authority does not arise in the ballot box, or by the electoral college or, in the tabloids: Christ's kingship arises in faith and hope. And his authority is one of *humility and service*.

But why is this important for us?

I might be treading on shaky ground here, but I am not sure that this Sunday, this feast, this reminder does not also fall today when it is needed most. At the end of a long and fraught national political campaign and election – when our country is more divided than in any time in recent memory – **SLIDE 4** when we are anxious about the future, our leaders, looking at everyone with a slight twinge of suspicion speculating - judging . . . I wonder who they . . . ?

We too live at a time when there seems to be an over emphasis on earthy or elected authority – on both sides of the political isle. We have invested so much of ourselves, our hopes, our futures on this election – on who wins and who loses – that we are in danger of forgetting in whom real authority resides – God in Christ – king of kings, lord of lords. As the passage from Colossians notes, we should be **SLIDE 5** "giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled us to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light for He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins."

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There is a well-known story about Margaret Thatcher during the time she was PM of the UK. While visiting a retirement home she met one elderly woman who seemed to have no idea who this famous woman in her room was. PM Thatcher said "Do you know who I am?" To which the elderly woman replied, " No dear, but I would ask the nurse if I were you, she usually knows."

It may be difficult, after the past few months of the constant barrage of political back and forth, but we, like the woman and this story, must forget society's notions of power and authority – to unrecognize the familiar faces of our political structure and to remember who we are and to whom we ultimately owe our fidelity.

Sounds good right – of course Christ is King – king of kings and lord of lords and all that - but actually *living* our lives as though Christ is sovereign over every aspect of them is just as challenging today as it was in the 1920s and 30s, or when Christ spoke those words, or in any other era of history. There are so many other influences and desires that clamor for our attention and lure us with promises that would tempt to pull us apart.

We are encountering division everywhere, in our government, in our own denomination, in our own community. We are living in a world of unease with no part of the world immune from acts of terror, distrust and hate. We are living in a world filled with poverty and violence, uncertainty and turmoil. And we at DCPC are not immune from this. I am sure there are folks here of all different political persuasions. And we are uncomfortable with each other

right now. We wrestle with how to move on when we don't agree, when some of us are hopeful and some without hope, when some of us are jubilant and some are scared.

We live in a time of already and not yet. We have gotten a taste of the future in Jesus Christ but remain under the bondage of this world. And although the Holy Spirit intercedes for us, we do not become immune to this world. The spirit intercedes precisely by keeping us firmly anchored in the present, with its shortcomings and imperfections to serve as individuals of hope for the world. **SLIDE 6** Romans 8:24-25 notes, "For in hope we are saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen, but if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience."

SLIDE 7 And we do hope, for although we follow Christ who has made us part of a kingdom not of this world, for now, it is *this* world we must live in; it is *this* world that pulls us this way and that; it is *this* world that attempts to divide us and it is *this* world's earthly temptations of hope and trust in *things and people* that we constantly have to weigh and it is THIS world's lures and promises that makes it difficult to discern the truth and the way of the kingdom of God.

But it is also THIS world that also needs us the most right now – it is in THIS world we have been called to be disciples, it is in THIS world that we must be agents for reconciliation, and it is in THIS world that we must love our neighbor and work for peace, justice and hope for all.

Why?

SLIDE 8 Because it was for THIS world that, as Colossians tells us "For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross."

SLIDE 9 Because God loved THIS world so much that he gave His only Son.

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So it is our responsibility in *this* place, *this* church, that each of us should be a place of hope, of hospice, of rest, of safety, whether you are joyous or in pain, thrilled or afraid. We may wrestle together as we bring our different points of view to a discussion, and while we might not change our opinions, we go away with love and respect for one another because we are a community of faith, bound together under only one authority – Christ as King. And as such, we support and uphold one another under that banner first and foremost above any other. In Christ's kingdom we are transformed from democrats and republicans, from male and female, from black and white into children of God.

This is not to say that we step away from the democratic process that has carried our country through its history. This is not to say that we abandon all trust in our government to care for and protect its citizens. Rather it is to remember that these kingdoms, these terms, are limited – by time, by human ability, by our sin.

When the Festival of Christ the King was first instituted and celebrated, proclaiming that Christ alone was Lord and King was a dangerous, counter-cultural choice to make. I'm not so sure it's all that different now. But if we proclaim Christ as King, and if we are to live out our call to go be and make disciples, to reconcile and be reconciled with one another, to love God and neighbor, then there is no other path for us than Christ's way of hope and promise.

Christ the King Sunday used to be celebrated on the last Sunday of October, but since the calendar reforms of 1969, the feast falls on the last Sunday of Ordinary Time, which is the Sunday before Advent. It is fitting that the feast celebrating Christ's kingship is observed this week right before Advent, when we liturgically wait for the promised Messiah (King).

Why? Because HE will reign forever and ever.