The readings for Sunday, Nov. 22, 2026:
First Reading: Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24
Psalm: Psalm 95:1-7a
Psalm (Semi-cont.): Psalm 100
Second Reading: Ephesians 1:15-23
Gospel: Matthew 25:31-46

This week, the liturgical year comes to a close with Christ the King Sunday. In some churches, this will be a high festival day that celebrates the power of Christ. But the Gospel reading makes it clear that Kingdom power is not the same as worldly power.

We might expect a Gospel reading that reminds us that Jesus transcended death. We might get a Gospel reading that tries to scare us with a vision of Christ at the next Coming, descending in glory to judge us. Well, in a way, we do.

But the vision we get is not the one that we might expect. We might expect to be judged and found wanting because of what we've been told are sins: our drinking, our gambling, our bad sexual choices. We might expect to be judged for all the Sundays we decided we'd prefer sleep to church. We might expect to be judged because we've been lazy, and we didn't go for that promotion at work.

This Gospel reminds us of how God will judge us. Did we feed the hungry, clothe the naked, welcome the stranger, visit the imprisoned? If so, then we have been attending to our royal tasks.

And why do we do this? The Bible is full of stories of the Divine showing up in circumstances where we wouldn't expect to find God. The Bible tells us that God prefers to hang out with the poor and the marginalized. If we want to find God, we need to go there. We have a history of thousands of years of Christians whose lives support what the Bible tells us--we will find God in the meekest of places.

Next week, we begin the season of Advent, where we remember one of our central Christian stories: God comes to be with us two thousand years ago, but not in the power center of Rome. No, God comes to us in one of the outposts of Roman civilizations, and God lives with one of the groups of people that the worldly, dominant power structure of the time despised.

This Gospel also reminds us that we are to see God in everyone. It's easy for me to see God in the eyes of my husband as he looks at me lovingly. It's harder for me to see my difficult coworker as Jesus incarnate. In any given day, we are besieged by people who aggravate us, from our family members to our colleagues to strangers who drive

the road with us or shop in the same stores or send their children to the same schools. By forcing myself to treat everyone as Jesus-in-Disguise, I will transform myself into the Christian that I want to be.

Jesus was the model, after all. Jesus had dinner with the outcast. Jesus treated everyone with love and respect, even people who were out to sabotage him. I could let myself off the hook by saying, "Well, yeah, he was God incarnate. I could do that too, if I was God incarnate."

No, you can do it, because Jesus did it. Jesus came to show us the full potential of a human life. Jesus came to dwell among us and to show us a better way to live. It's not the way the world tells us to live. The world would scoff at a king who sought out the poor and dispossessed, who sold his possessions so that he would have more money for the poor.

But Christians know that our power lies in our compassion. We don't achieve compassion by sitting in our homes, working on being more compassionate. We become more compassionate in the same way that God did, by getting involved in the world.

And we're not doing this for some after-death reward, although many preachers will use this Gospel to lecture on that. We do this because God has invited us to be part of the redemption of creation – not in some far away time, but in our very own. We don't have to wait for Jesus to come again. When we model Jesus in our everyday behavior, Christ re-enters the world.

We're not here to make money, to have a good retirement, to accumulate stuff. God has a greater purpose for us, one that will leave us infinitely more satisfied.