The Rev. Emily Dunevant

November 22, 2026
Christ the King

Matthew 25:31-46
Ezek. 34:11-16,20-24
Psalm 95:1-7a
Ephesians 1:15-23

In the early morning hours on Friday…and by early I mean 3am…I woke up…wide awake.

My sermon was pouring into my mind and so I stared at the ceiling patiently waiting for each word to take shape. It's a strange sensation when that happens as though the Holy Spirit is giving you exactly what to say. So, as a priest…you do the one thing you must do…you tell the story you've been given.

And today's story is all about relying on a king.

Let's start with the big picture. The year was 1925. World War I had ended and people around the world were living in a time of tension and uncertainty. Nationalism, communism, and fascism were on the rise. Economic hardship had taken hold. People were trying to make sense of the world around them, seeking some kind of hope in the midst of unspeakable adversity.

Pope Pius XI answered those cries by instituting the Solemnity of Christ the King, a feast day designed with one purpose…to remind us that there is a power greater than anything on this earth. That no matter what hardships we may face, God gives us strength and courage to overcome hate and division and fear.

Because Christ our King doesn't move through this world operating by human standards and thank goodness for that. Instead, Christ claims justice and peace and love even from the cross, even from crisis, even from pain. And we can claim Christ as our king because we know that his redemptive love will always be greater than any earthly leader or faction who uses power to dominate, threaten, or abuse. And we also know that his redemptive love will always be greater than any adversity or hardship you or I may face.

And so, Pope Pius XI in his institution of this feast day wanted to remind the world that there will always be hope when we follow this king. You can almost hear Pius reciting the words from Ephesians…

[17]I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ…may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, [18]so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you…[19]and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power…[20]God put this power to work in Christ …[21]far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named…

Folks…this hope that we are given is good news! And it's this hopeful news that we are reminded of today.

And our Gospel text goes into detail about how we might embody the hope we are given for ourselves and for the world. Jesus teaches in Matthew…

Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; [35]for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, [36]I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.'

This is the big picture, the good news, of a hopeful life in Christ as our King. But I will venture to say that even with these beautiful descriptions of faith, I think we need to go a little deeper.

Because there is another important building block to understanding what Christ the King means for us. And that understanding, that building block, can only grow out of our genuine reliance on Christ in our personal lives. It's in the foundation we cultivate every single day when we trust that our lives are lovingly held by God. When we not only read about this hopeful life, but when we are willing to claim it as our own.

This is where my story for you begins. It starts with opening our hearts to God.

Now some of you know this story and I will tell it a thousand times over to share my own understanding of what it means to rely deeply and fully on Christ.

My first knowledge of the power of Christ came when I was 8 years old at an altar call in a little southern Baptist church in South Carolina. During the last hymn of the service, the pastor stood at the front of the church and we were invited to give our lives to Christ. I cannot tell you exactly what happened that day. What I can tell you is that I was carried down that aisle (I don't remember walking)…carried by a God who loved me beyond anything I had ever felt before. In that moment, as an 8 year old little girl, I knew something that was beyond words. And from that day forward, I never ***ever*** felt separate from God. It was the deepest sense of peace I have ever felt. And I cried that day standing in front of my church.

And that memory, that feeling, has become a part of my heart and it has carried me through some of the darkest times life could have thrown at me. I was talking to Dwayne about this the other day…about those dark and difficult times…we all have them. They just look different for each of us. For some of us that dark and difficult time may be the death of a loved one, a divorce, a health diagnosis that is changing your life moment by moment. For others it is a job loss or a serious depression that pulls all of the hope and joy out of each day. We can all relate to these moments when it feels like the bottom drops out.

And when it does…what do you fall back on? What sustains you? What gets you through to another day?

I will tell you now that the bottom has completely dropped out for me twice in my life. Once when I was 17 and then again when I was in my early 40's. The first time it dropped my family had lost everything. We lost our family business and our home. My father tried to commit to suicide. And the rest of the family was left trying to pick up the pieces. It was my senior year in high school and the only thing that kept me afloat was my church youth group. I remember there was so much going on behind the scenes at home that no one knew about because I was able to go to school every day and do all the things a 17-year-old should do. And even though most of my world felt very, very dark, I felt peace. And I am here to tell you there was only one place that peace could have come from. And thank God I had people around me showing me how to trust God when I felt I couldn't trust anything else.

The second time the bottom fell was when I lost my marriage and found myself navigating life as a single mother trying to pay the bills and put food on the table. My boys were dealing with their father's health crisis and every day felt like I was climbing an impossible mountain without a safety net. Life as I had planned it was gone in an instant. I remember just waiting for 8pm to come every night so I could crawl into bed and close out the world a few hours. And one day I found myself on my knees at St. Stephen's Church in Richmond with a healing prayer minister praying over me and right there, yet again, I cried, and I felt peace.

I know you have those moments too. We all do. When darkness and uncertainty seem like the only things that have control and yet there is something so much more powerful holding you and sustaining you. Something that never lets the bottom drop out completely.

And I am here to tell you…I know with all of my heart that I could not have navigated those times if I didn't believe that God was greater than any adversity I might face. I could not have navigated those times if I didn't believe that Christ was my king. And we are all called to believe that this king is going to love us and guide us and sustain us no matter what we may go through. We are promised that.

No matter if we are hungry or thirsty or sick or imprisoned there will always, always be hope.

But it starts with our relationship with Jesus. We need to feel it, experience it, and trust it. And that relationship is foundational to everything else we are called to do as Christians.

Christ the King is not just an observance on the church calendar. It is a way to live…a way to live that will change everything about who you are and who you are called to be. Because Christ our King will never ever let you give up hope.