

Christ the King  
Jeremiah 23: 1-6, Psalm 46  
Luke 23: 33-43

St. Peter's Glenside  
Rev. Laura Palmer  
November 24, 2019

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable to you, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer. AMEN

Good morning. If you've been an Episcopalian for more than ten minutes, you probably know that our church was founded after Henry VIII, who wanted to remarry (yet again), was blocked by the Pope from getting a divorce. So Henry rebelled against Papal authority by cutting ties with Rome and creating the Church of England, the Anglican Church.

So here we are, celebrating Christ the King Sunday which marks the end of our liturgical year. But it didn't become part of our long, historic tradition, until 1925, when the Pope, yes, that Pope in Rome, Pope Pius XI, created the Feast Day of Christ the King. Empires were not doing well after the First World War, and the Pope wanted to shore up the Christian Empire and counter a rising tide of secularism and nationalism.

But nowhere in the New Testament does Christ call himself king. While he could be blunt and direct – Love your neighbor as yourself—for example, he could also be evasive—as he was when Pilate asked him if he were King of the Jews. “You say that I am,” Jesus replies. In today's gospel Jesus is asked to prove that he's king by saving himself. He doesn't.

Jesus was crucified because he was a threat to the Empire. He proclaimed God's kingdom, not Pilate's. A kingdom of justice, mercy, forgiveness and peace, where the hungry are fed, the poor clothed, the sick are healed and *all* are equal and beloved in the heart of God. No wonder Jesus dodged the question. The truth would have killed him. But it did anyway. The sign on the cross proclaimed him “King of the Jews.”

See if these words remind you of the one we worship:

“Years after his death shows the persistence of a certain kind of human hunger—the hunger for goodness. He had faith in us, and even if his faith turns out to have been misplaced, even if we have abandoned him, he somehow endures, standing between us and our electrified, antipathies and recriminations like that Tank Man of Tiananmen Square in a red sweater. He is a warrior all right, because he is not just unarmed, outgunned, outnumbered; he is long gone and yet he keeps up the fight.”

Did the red sweater give it away? How about those blue sneakers that he put on day after day? Those words were written about Fred Rogers, Mr. Rogers, and appear in the December issue of the *Atlantic* magazine. Although he never mentioned it, Mr. Rogers was an ordained Presbyterian minister, who in his own quiet and humble goodness, preached a gospel of radical human kindness on a thousand TV shows to generations of children and their parents.

Growing up in a family where feelings were never talked about, and bullied as a child because he was fat, Fred Rogers understood painfully--and powerfully-- that children have feelings and are worthy of love. “Red, brown, yellow, black and white, they are precious in his sight, Jesus loved the little children of the world. So did Fred and he wanted children to feel cherished—“There’s never been anyone in the world just like you” and understand their feelings.

Mr. Rogers wasn’t Jesus. But he modeled the kingdom that Jesus proclaimed.

The *Atlantic* article, written by Tom Junod, the journalist fictionalized in the new movie that’s out this weekend, *A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood*, wrote that Fred’s message could be distilled down to these six words: “You were a child once too.”

Junod continues, “It was also the basis of his strange superpowers. He wanted us to remember what it was like to be a child so that he could talk to us; he wanted to talk to us so that we could remember what it was like to be a child. And he could talk to anyone believing that if you remember what it was like to be a child, you would remember that you were a child of God.”

As children of God, then, our place is in God’s kingdom, where we unite each week in the Eucharist with the body and lifeblood of his son, Jesus. A priest friend

who's no fan of Christ the King Sunday said, "The problem is that it's too much about Jesus' death. I really believe he came to show us how to live."

We have seen, all too drastically, these past few three years, what happens when the leader of our democracy prefers to govern like a king: praising authoritarian rulers, refusing to condemn white supremacists, endorsing policies that separate children from their parents, spewing discredited conspiracy theories that poison our democracy and insisting that the truth is what he says it is and everything else is "fake news."

Jesus is a threat to that kind of kingship—still unarmed, outgunned, and outnumbered, as he has always been.

Mr. Rogers died sixteen years ago. Tom Junod, journalist who became his close friend wrote in the *Atlantic* piece that he is often asked about what Mr. Rogers would say about the outrages of today.

Fred was the most stubbornly consistent of men. He would say that Donald Trump was a child once too. He would say that the latest Twitter victim or villain was a child once too. He would even say that the mass murderers of El Paso and Dayton were children once too—that in fact they were very nearly *still* children at 21 and 24 respectively—and he would be heartbroken that children have become both the source and the target of so much animus. He would pray for the shooters as well as their victims, and he would continue to urge us, in what has become one of his most oft quoted lines to "look for the helpers."

In a few weeks, we'll all sing, "This, this, is Christ the King, whom shepherds guard and Angels sing." And none of us will ever fail to rise to the majesty of the Messiah's Alleluia chorus: "King of king, forever, and ever, Lord of Lord, forever and ever, King of kings and Lord of Lords..."

But remember the kingdom to which we belong is God's kingdom.

Jesus was a child once, too, as Fred Rogers might say and there had never been anyone just like him ever before. Our church celebrates him as king today.

But like Fred, the question he kept asking, and keeps asking us today, 2,000 years later is

“Won’t you be my neighbor?”

The answer changes everything.

AMEN

There are Sundays when I think that if Jesus came to St. Peter’s the first thing he’d do was scoop up Kiaran when he ran down the aisle and scoop him into his loving arms, smiling.