

What do you do on a Sunday like this? It's the Sunday after Thanksgiving and the Sunday before Advent. The problem we have in the church is that we are not like Wal-Mart or Best Buy or J.C. Penney. We are the church and we operate on God's calendar. God has this funny way of wanting us to live in the moment and not rush ahead. Wal-Mart and Best Buy and J.C. Penney, among others, have rushed ahead to Christmas Day already and I'm surprised they haven't started advertising the day after Christmas sales! Is it just me or is shopping the day after Thanksgiving becoming more important in our culture than Thanksgiving itself?

Alisha, the boys, and I went to my grandparents' house in Shreveport for Thanksgiving. We were watching television on Thanksgiving Day and I could not believe the number of ads advertising "Black Friday" sales at the stores. J.C. Penney opened at 4:00 a.m.! Best Buy opened at 5:00 a.m.! They called their sales "Doorbusters". In other words, the sales would be so good that people would literally cram into the doorway to get the latest gadget at the best price. There were actually people camping out in tents to get the super price on a new laptop. Are you kidding me? We hadn't even digested our Turkey and dressing when we were bombarded with advertisements for Christmas. The ads go something like this: "Buy this for your sweetheart – diamonds are forever. If you really love her go out tomorrow morning in the freezing cold to save \$50 on a necklace that was overpriced to begin with!" That's the Christmas spirit!

I just don't know what to do with this Sunday. I'm confused. Watching television you would think we would need to schedule a Christmas Eve service for tonight because at the pace they are going Christmas Day will be here tomorrow and if we don't do something quick we are going to miss the birth of Jesus! Forget the fact that it is still November, let's go ahead and break out the candles and have a candlelight service! Call Grandma and Grandpa and tell them Christmas is a month early this year!

I'm glad we have something called a Christian calendar and that we are forced to take our time in getting to Christmas. I know it's hard to wait, especially in our culture, but that is exactly what you and I are called to do over the next month. We are called to wait on the coming of our Savior and reflect on what it means to have Him as a part of our lives. Shame on me! I'm jumping ahead just like Best Buy and J.C. Penney and all the others. Today is not the beginning of Advent; that is next Sunday. Today is Christ

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the King Sunday, and how appropriate it is that we talk about how Christ is King and not Wal-Mart or Best Buy or that job or that spouse or that kid, but Christ.

“Christ the King” it sounds so benign and harmless. It sounds like something we could easily gloss over and forget about. Sometimes we can be so familiar with a concept or idea that it loses its meaning for us. The old saying goes “familiarity breeds contempt” but what about “familiarity breeds indifference and apathy and numbness”. Norman Vincent Peale told about a time when he spoke to a community in Bloomington, Illinois: “They have two small suburbs there. One little town is called “Normal” and the other is “Oblong”. I was reading through the paper the night before I was to speak, to get something current about the local situation for my sermon. On one page I saw a small headline that read ‘Normal Boy Marries Oblong Girl’. I thought that was hilarious, but when I said that from the pulpit, nobody laughed. It was just too familiar for them to see in perspective.”

I’m afraid that is what happens to so many of us in church. We become so familiar with the catch phrases that we lose the power and meaning behind them. When I said, “Today is Christ the King Sunday” it didn’t exactly elicit an emotional response from you. I didn’t see anyone falling down in the aisle or doing back flips in the choir loft. But think about it – what do we really mean when we say Christ is King?

It might seem strange to you to have sermon on the crucifixion of Jesus right before Advent and Christmas, but perhaps it would do us well to begin at the end. Maybe we could better understand the birth of Christ and reason for Christ being the King when we come to grips with what he did for us on the cross. Luke tells us that he was crucified between two criminals. Crucifixions were common in those days. People were crucified not just as a means of punishment but also as a means of deterrent. Crucifixions took place along the common roads in and out of town. I’m sure you have seen those pictures of Jesus being crucified between two others high on a hill in a remote setting, but that is not likely what the setting was like. Imagine walking down Milam street and seeing someone hanging on a cross right there by a stop sign. That would definitely get our attention, and that is exactly what happened to Jesus. He was crucified in public.

According to Luke, as Jesus was being crucified he said, “Father forgive them for they know not what they are doing.” That amazes me. To think that as he was being humiliated and tortured he had enough love inside

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of him to speak on behalf of the very ones who were putting him to death. The irony in all of this is that as Jesus was saying asking God to forgive them there were people casting lots for his clothing. We are not told who was casting lots for his clothes. All we know is that while the Son of God died for humanity there were those who had nothing better to do than roll dice for his clothes. Everyone seemed to take turns in making fun of him. Some of the people said, "He saved others, let him save himself if he really is the Anointed One of God." The soldiers joined in the fun by saying, "If you are the King of the Jews then save yourself." In their mind a king was someone who could snap his fingers and get whatever he wanted done accomplished. And a king certainly would not take the abuse that Jesus took that day. A king would fight back. A king would summons his army and fight fire with fire. A real king would load up the tanks and go to war. A real king would build a bigger nuclear bomb. But that is not our King operates. They didn't understand it then, and we don't fully understand it now.

It all comes down to expectations. What do we expect out of those in power? I had an interesting experience last Saturday evening. Alisha and I were in Waco on a date when I began to experience shortness of breath. It got so bad that my heart started racing. My blood pressure shot through the roof and I thought I was having a heart attack. We rushed to Hillcrest Hospital where they ran a bunch of tests on me in the emergency. As things turned out it wasn't my heart. We left the hospital with a good news/bad news kind of scenario. I was glad my heart was not the problem, but I was concerned because I wanted to know why I was so short of breath to the point of almost passing out. The doctor said one possibility could be asthma. So I made an appointment with the allergist in Waco on Tuesday and was tested for allergies and asthma.

Dr. Daftary came in and tested me for allergies. If you have ever been tested for allergies you know how they prick your back to test you. I knew right away that I was allergic to everything under the sun. My back felt like it was on fire. The doctor said, "Don't scratch it for twenty minutes." When she came back in the room after twenty minutes she took one look at my back and said, "Oh my!" That is not what you want an allergist to say when she looks at your test results. She said I was one of the worst cases she has seen for allergies to outside elements. In other words, if it's outside and living I'm allergic to it. Grass, weeds, trees, mold, etc. I have always suffered with allergies but never knew it was quite this bad. The doctor then

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said something that made me feel really good. She said definitively, “The reason you have been short of breath is due to your allergies and your swollen bronchial tube. That is why you feel out of breath.” That is what I want to hear from my doctor. Here it is in black and white. This is what is wrong with you and this is what you need to do. In my case, I’m starting on allergy shots tomorrow. I would not have been as pleased had she come into the room and said, “Well, it looks like you might be allergic to some stuff but I’m not quite sure about it. I really don’t what your problem is. And as far as the breathing thing goes, your guess is as good as mine.” That is not what we pay doctors to say to us.

We expect the same thing from others in society whom we place in positions of authority. Vulnerability is not a characteristic we want to see in our leaders. Imagine if the President of the United States went on television and said to the entire nation: “You know I’m just not sure about this issue. I just don’t have a good handle on it right now. Frankly, I don’t know what to do but am going to do the best I can.” That is not how we want our President to talk. We want our President to be confident and assured. Vulnerability is not acceptable and any sign of weakness is seen as a negative.

Yet here we have Jesus in the most vulnerable of positions on a cross. He is spread eagle on a piece of wood dying in agony while everyone is making fun of him, and we are here today and have the nerve to refer to this Sunday as Christ the King Sunday. Is that what a King looks like? Does a king just sit there and take it when others mock him? Does a king just let it go when others spit on him and punch him? Does a king let some two-bit Roman soldier drive nails into his hands? Not the king you and I would vote for, but it’s the king we have in Jesus. The King we serve is the King who loves his enemies, even it means dying for them.

Luke is the only gospel writer who says anything at all about the thief on the cross next to Jesus who asked to be remembered in His kingdom. We don’t know his name. We don’t know what he did to get hung up on a cross. We don’t know anything about his past. Presumably he was not a boy scout who obeyed all the rules. He no doubt did something very wrong. What amazes me most about this man is that he saw something in Jesus that made him think Jesus was a king. He was not one of his disciples. He was not present when Jesus fed over 5,000 men plus women and children. He was not on the boat when Jesus walked on water. He was not on the street corner when Jesus healed the ten lepers. But he was there when Jesus was being

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mocked and crucified. So why on earth would this man be willing to put his eternal soul in the hands of a man being crucified next door?

It's funny how the only one who recognized the King that day was one who was being crucified himself. What does a king look like? I guess it depends on your perspective. Maybe the ones who can see the King most clearly are the ones who are most vulnerable and hurting. I can tell you this from experience, I thought more about Christ being the King as I sat in that emergency room last Saturday night than I did the night before or any other day. Christ is King! Amen.