



# The Episcopal Church of St. John the Baptist

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The Rev. Thomas M. White, Rector

## HOMILY FOR THE FESTIVAL OF CHRIST THE KING November 20, 2016

Please pray with me: God of universes yet to be discovered, the Everlasting Sovereign, on the cross of your beloved Son you reveal the unsurpassed power of compassion and mercy. May your tender love shine through us to any and all who are oppressed. In the name of King Jesus we pray. Amen.

Mr. Donald Trump is going to be our President. But Christ is our King, the King of kings, the Lord of lords, yesterday, today, and forever! For women and men of faith, whether your political affiliation is red, or blue, or green, whether you are conservative or progressive, our ruler, our sovereign, supremely is King Jesus!

I have been called by the Holy Spirit, called by the Church, called by the Episcopal Diocese of Delaware, and called by this congregation of St. John the Baptist to preach, not politics, but rather God's sacred Word, to proclaim the Good News of God's love and mercy, love and mercy that was nailed to a cross, that was snuffed out by death, but was resurrected three days later, never to die again! Yet, let's be clear, Christian values for people of faith must govern our politics, and our relationships, and our jobs, and our stewardship, indeed, the totality of our life. Why? Because Christ is the King.

As an example, in the Second Reading for today, St. Paul says of Christ that "in him all things in heaven and earth were created...all things have been created through him." God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit brought all creation into being. Because our faith tells us this is true, caring for the creation is a Christian value to which we must be committed, and that includes advocating politically for the environment. Who can think for a moment that the God who created everything, universe upon universe, heaven and earth and all that is in them, doesn't care if we rape, pillage, and trash God's creation? And on this Pledge Sunday, we decide how much time, how many of our talents, and the amount of our money we will give back to God by supporting the work of Christ's Church, all out of the conviction that all our time, talents, and treasure are gifts to us from the Creator God.

In the Gospel of St. Matthew, from which most of the Gospel readings will come for the new church year that begins next Sunday, Jesus ends his teaching ministry with a parable. In Matthew's Gospel it is the last parable Jesus tells before his arrest and crucifixion. So, in a sense Jesus summarizes his entire ministry with this parable and, so, it is utterly significant and critically important. It is the parable of the sheep and the goats. To his followers, the sheep, Jesus says: "I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison, and you came to visit me." And the sheep, in utter confusion and surprise, ask how it was possible that they did any of these loving deeds to Jesus? And King Jesus replies: Whatever you did for those in need, you did for me." So, caring for the vulnerable and hurting of our nation and world is a Christian value. And for us for whom Jesus is King, it has not only personal, but political consequences. The parable has political implications for health care coverage, for welcoming refugees, for criminal justice reform, for homelessness, and for food assistance programs. Our Christian values need to be expressed politically.

Bishop Michael Curry, Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church in the United States, speaks of our Christian values in a statement he issued last Monday. I would like to share a portion of it with you. He writes: "As a Church, seeking to follow the way of Jesus, who taught us, 'you shall love your neighbor as yourself,' and to 'do to others as you would have them do to you,' we maintain our long-standing commitment to support and welcome refugees and immigrants, and to stand with those who live in our midst without documentation. We reaffirm that like all people LGBT persons are entitled to full civil rights and protection under the law. We reaffirm and renew the principles of inclusion and protection of the civil rights of all persons with disabilities. We commit to the honor and dignity of women and speak out against sexual or gender-based violence. We affirm the right to freedom of religious expression and vibrant presence of different religious communities, especially our Muslim sisters and brothers. We acknowledge our responsibility in the stewardship of creation and all that God has given into our hands. And do so because God is the Creator. We are all God's children, created equally in God's image."

Followers of King Jesus cannot tolerate intolerance, cannot make peace with oppression, cannot reconcile with injustice. Hatred must never be normalized. For Christ is the King, the King of love! Why is it, do you think, that Jesus deliberately chooses to reign as King from a rough-hewn cross rather than a splended palace, his crown one of thorns rather than a diadem of gold encrusted with precious gems? Why does King Jesus choose hanging from a cross as his throne, naked rather than robed in ermine and the finest purple cloth, a suffering and suffocating man, the life blood draining from his writhing body, wracked with pain I cannot fathom? Why?

Can it be to remind us forevermore that Jesus stands in solidarity with all the vulnerable of the world, the victims of bigotry, the marginalized, the excluded, all who endure injustice and oppression, in solidarity with all who suffer. King Jesus reigns from a cross and not a palace to reveal undeniably, unequivocally, and supremely the power of love, turning his back on the love of power. There, on the cross, the religious and political authorities tried their best to kill the power of Christ, yet there, on the cross, it broke into its fullest expression and power. The cross is Jesus' crowning glory. There, where power tried to trump love, love trumped hatred. There, on the cross, Jesus does not vow retribution even on those who are mocking and crucifying him, but instead forgives them. There, on the cross, Jesus, gasping for every breath, nonetheless gives attention and concern to a penitent criminal on the cross beside his, comforting him with the promise of Paradise, speaking words of blessing even in Jesus' darkest and direst hour. This is the way of King Jesus.

The cross of Jesus around which we gather in hope, to which we bow in homage, is all about, is supremely about, God's heart of compassion. So, I believe that as followers of King Jesus the way to move through dark and difficult times is to focus always on being the compassion of God in a too often compassionless world, looking constantly for ways we can advocate for, and defend, those who earthly rulers find it so convenient to trample upon, diminish, and ignore. Let us swear our allegiance to King Jesus by striving in every way conceivable to be the force of compassion, the force for everything that is good and decent in the world.

Today our church year ends where all human history will end, at the feet of Christ the King. And next Sunday will be our New Year's Day, the beginning of the season of Advent, the season where we as God's people walk into the darkness, but through it to dawning light, to everlasting Light shining from a manger, the first cries of new life ringing in our ears. Even in the worst of times the Messiah will be born! There might be reason to be scared right now, reason to be anxious, reason even to despair. But we are the people of hope. We are a people not abandoned. A people swearing a heavenly allegiance! That's the message of the cross from which King Jesus reigns. Mr. Trump will be our President, but Christ is the King, now and forevermore!

† In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.