

THE LAST SUNDAY OF AFTER PENTECOST: PROPER 29

Jeremiah 23:1-6

Canticle 16

Colossians 1:11-20

Luke 23:33-43

November 19, 2010

St. Matthews Church

Chesterfield, VA

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CHRIST THE KING

THERE ARE MANY CALENDARS THAT GOVERN OUR LIVES!

- THE YEARLY CALENDAR – JANUARY TO DECEMBER
- THE SCHOOL CALENDAR – SEPTEMBER TO JUNE
- THE CALENDAR OF OUR LIVES - BIRTH TO DEATH
- AND LOTS OF OTHER MINI CALENDARS – THAT INCLUDE WORK SCHEDULES, SPORTS SCHEDULES, CAMP SCHEDULES, FEEDING SCHEDULES
- HOME CALENDARS THAT KEEP TRACK OF APPOINTMENTS AND SPECIAL DATES.

ALL THESE CALENDARS DEPEND UPON CLOCK TIME OR AS THE GREEKS CALL IT *CHRONOS*. IT'S A HUMAN CONSTRUCT. NOT EVERY CIVILIZATION UTILIZES IT, BUT IT IS CLEARLY A CHARACTERISTIC OF WESTERN OR EUROPEAN SOCIETY. IT'S HOW WE ORGANIZE AND CONTROL OUR LIVES.

THE CHURCH HAS SET UP A CALENDAR TOO! SOME CALL IT THE CHURCH YEAR, OTHERS THE LITURGICAL YEAR. NOT ALL DENOMINATIONS FOLLOW IT, BUT MORE AND MORE ARE AT LEAST UTILIZING PARTS OF IT. IT IS A WAY THE CHURCH HAS TRIED TO HELP US MOVE BEYOND SECULAR TIME, BEYOND *CHRONOS* OR CLOCK TIME TO GOD'S TIME – *KAIROS* TIME. GOD'S TIME IS TIME THAT IS OUTSIDE THE BOUNDS OF OUR HUMAN ORGANIZATION AND PLANNING. *KAIROS* TIME IS TIME IN GOD'S KINGDOM – WHEN GOD IS PRESENT AND ACTING.

THE CHURCH YEAR IS ONE WAY THAT IS MEANT TO HELP US GLIMPSE INTO GOD'S *KAIROS* - WHAT GOD HAS DONE, IS DOING AND WILL DO. AS WITH ANYTHING WE HUMANS ORGANIZE AND PLAN IT HAS IT'S FLAWS! GOD'S TIME IS OUTSIDE OF HUMAN HISTORY AND BOUNDARIES.

TODAY IN CHURCH TIME, WE COME TO THE END OF THE CHURCH'S YEAR. THIS IS THE LAST SUNDAY OF THE SEASON AFTER PENTECOST. IT IS SOMETIMES CALLED "CHRIST THE KING SUNDAY". ON THIS SUNDAY WE CONTEMPLATE GOD'S TRIUMPHANT WORK AMONG US TO SAVE US FROM OUR SINS AND BE WITH HIM IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD. THIS IS THE DAY WE RECOGNIZE THAT GOD HAS BROUGHT ALL THINGS TO COMPLETION IN JESUS CHRIST AND THAT CHRIST REIGNS AS KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.

THE CHURCH YEAR IS ORGANIZED AROUND TWO GREAT FESTIVALS – CHRISTMAS CELEBRATING THE BIRTH OF CHRIST AND EASTER CELEBRATING RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST FROM THE DEAD.. THE CHRISTMAS CYCLE BEGINS WITH ADVENT AND ENDS WITH THE BAPTISM OF CHRIST ON THE SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY. THE SECOND GREAT CYCLE BEGINS WITH LENT –CONCLUDES WITH THE DAY OF PENTECOST. THE SUNDAYS NOT IN THE CYCLE ARE CALLED ARE SUNDAYS IN EPIPHANY AND SUNDAYS AFTER PENTECOST.

THE YEAR BEGAN 51 WEEKS AGO ON ADVENT 1. IN ADVENT WE LOOK FORWARD TO CHRIST'S COMING –FIRST TO HIS SECOND COMING AT THE END OF ALL THINGS AND THEN TO HIS BIRTH. CHRISTMAS DAY BRINGS THE CELEBRATION OF THE BIRTH OF CHRIST. THE EPIPHANY BROUGHT US THE WISE MEN. THE SEASON OF SUNDAYS AFTER THE EPIPHANY FOCUSES CONTINUES WITH THE BAPTISM OF JESUS AND OTHER VARIOUS MANIFESTATIONS OR REVELATIONS OF CHRIST. IT DRAWS TO A CLOSE WITH THE TRANSFIGURATION OF CHRIST ON THE LAST SUNDAY OF EPIPHANY.

NEXT IN THE CHURCH YEAR WE MOVED INTO LENT A SEASON OF FASTING, PRAYER AND REFLECTION AS WE PREPARE FOR THE CRUCIFIXION AND RESURRECTION OF CHRIST. THE SEASON AFTER EASTER INCLUDES APPEARANCES TO THE DISCIPLES AFTER THE RESURRECTION, THE ASCENSION AND CONCLUDES WITH

THE DAY OF PENTECOST WHEN THE HOLY SPIRIT DESCENDED UPON THE BELIEVERS AND THEY WENT FORTH TO PREACH AND HEAL AND PROCLAIM CHRIST. THE LONG SEASON AFTER PENTECOST PRESENTS MANY OF THE STORIES OF JESUS' WORK DURING HIS EARTHLY LIFE. AND NOW TODAY WE HAVE COME FULL CIRCLE TO THE RECOGNITION THAT JESUS IS KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.

EACH OF TODAY'S SCRIPTURES CELEBRATE THIS GRAND CULMINATION OF THE REIGN OF CHRIST. THE HEBREW SCRIPTURE – JEREMIAH IS A TESTIMONY TO AND A LOOKING FORWARD TO THE PROMISE OF GOD THAT GOD WILL RAISE UP A KING – A SON OF DAVID – A RIGHTEOUS BRANCH WHO SHALL REIGN AS KING AND DEAL WISELY – EXECUTING JUSTICE AND RIGHTEOUSNESS IN THE LAND.

THE CANTICLE WE USED IN PLACE OF THE PSALM IS THE SONG OF ZECHARIAH FROM LUKE. IT RECOGNIZES THAT GOD'S PROMISE IS BEING FULFILLED. ZECHARIAH, THE FATHER OF JOHN THE BAPTIST BURSTS FORTH INTO THIS JOYOUS SONG KNOWING THAT HIS SON SOON TO BE BORN WILL BE THE ONE WHO PREPARES THE WAY FOR THE COMING OF THE LORD – HE WILL BE CALLED THE PROPHET OF THE MOST HIGH AND GO BEFORE THE LORD TO PREPARE THE WAY.

COLOSSIANS GETS RIGHT TO THE POINT NOTING THAT WE HAVE BEEN RESCUED FROM THE POWER OF DARKNESS AND TRANSFERRED INTO THE KINGDOM OF GOD'S BELOVED SON. HE IS THE IMAGE OF THE INVISIBLE GOD, THE FIRSTBORN OF ALL CREATION. IN HIM ALL THINGS IN HEAVEN AND ON EARTH WERE CREATED. . . HE IS THE HEAD OF THE BODY, THE CHURCH; HE IS THE BEGINNING, THE FIRSTBORN FROM THE DEAD . . . IN HIM ALL THE FULLNESS OF GOD IS PLEASED TO DWELL.

HOW CAN WE NOT KNOW WHO CHRIST IS AFTER THAT?

BUT THEN OUR GOSPEL SEEMS TO GO IN A DIFFERENT DIRECTION – AS WE ARE SUDDENLY CONFRONTED WITH LUKE'S ACCOUNT OF THE CRUCIFIXION. HOW DOES

THIS GOSPEL FIT WITH TODAY'S CELEBRATION OF CHRIST THE KING? HOW DOES IT FIT WITH JESUS AS KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS? WHY DO WE READ ABOUT THE CRUCIFIXION TODAY?

ONE PRACTICAL REASON – HEARING IT TODAY GIVES US TIME TO REFLECT ON THE CRUCIFIXION. OFTEN WHEN WE HEAR THE ENTIRE PASSION READ ON PALM SUNDAY OR GOOD FRIDAY IT IS HARD TO TAKE IT ALL IN. THERE IS NO REAL POSSIBILITY OF THINKING ABOUT AND REFLECTING ON THE CRUCIFIXION VERSE BY VERSE OR SECTION BY SECTION. IT'S A LOT TO TAKE IN AND DIGEST. TODAY WE HAVE ONE BRIEF PORTION – THE ONE WHICH ZEROS IN ON THE CRUCIFIXION ITSELF. SO WE CAN FOCUS ON ONE OR TWO POINTS.

THERE IS A POLITICAL/HISTORICAL REASON FOR TODAY'S GOSPEL. THE INSCRIPTION OVER JESUS' HEAD SAID, "THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS." IN THE EYES OF THE ROMANS THERE WAS ONLY ONE KING, ONE LORD – CAESAR. CLAIMING TO BE KING OR LORD WAS HIGH TREASON AND IF SUCH A ONE WAS CAUGHT IT LED TO CERTAIN DEATH. ALTHOUGH JESUS HIMSELF DID NOT CLAIM TO BE KING THE JEWISH LEADERS SAID BEFORE PILATE THAT JESUS HAD CLAIMED THIS TITLE. IF JESUS IS KING/LORD – CAESAR IS NOT. IT'S TREASON PUNISHABLE BY DEATH.

BUT THIS CUTS INTO OUR LIVES TOO. IT'S A QUESTION WE ARE CALLED TO ASK OUR SELVES – WHO IS KING IN YOUR LIFE/ MY LIFE? IS IT JESUS? IS CAESAR – IN THE FORM OF MONEY OR WEALTH, POWER OR CONTROL? IS THE CAESAR IN LIFE YOUR OWN WANTS AND DESIRES? IF JESUS IS NOT KING IN YOUR LIFE, THEN CAESAR OR DARKNESS IS. DARKNESS IS NOT ITSELF WRONG OR EVIL – BUT IT IS IN DARKNESS – WHERE THERE IS NO LIGHT THAT EVIL AND SIN CAN TAKE PLACE UNDETECTED. DARKNESS PROVIDES THE COVER FOR SIN AND EVIL TO HAPPEN. HOW THEN SHALL WE LIVE? WILL WE LIVE IN THE LIGHT OF CHRIST OR IN THE DARKNESS OF THE CAESARS IN OUR LIVES? IT'S A CHOICE. WE ARE CALLED TO

MAKE EACH AND EVERY DAY OF OUR LIVES. WHO IS KING IN YOUR LIFE? WHO IS LORD OF MY LIFE?

FINALLY THERE’S A GRACE FILLED REASON – WE KNOW THAT THE ONE WHO IS KING OF KINGS DIES A HUMILIATING AND DREADFUL DEATH ON THE CROSS. YET OF THOSE WHO TRIED, CONDEMNED AND CRUCIFIED HIM HE SAYS “FATHER FORGIVE THEM FOR THEY KNOW NOT WHAT THEY ARE DOING.” THIS IS THE WAY OF THE CROSS – FORGIVENESS FOR THOSE WHO HARM YOU, FOR THOSE WHO SEEK TO DESTROY OR KILL YOU. THIS IS JESUS’ WAY. AS CHRISTIANS, BAPTIZED INTO CHRIST AND SEALED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT WE ARE CALLED TO FOLLOW THE WAY OF JESUS. LIKE JESUS FORGIVENESS IS TO BE A PART OF LIVES – DAILY. IT DOESN’T MATTER WHAT FORM THE HURT OR ABUSE TAKES OR WHETHER THOSE WHO PERSECUTE YOU SEEK TO HARM YOU PHYSICALLY, SPIRITUALLY, MENTALLY, EMOTIONALLY OR PROFESSIONALLY. THE WAY OF JESUS IS TO FORGIVE – FOR SUCH PEOPLE KNOW NOT WHAT THEY DO. TO FOLLOW JESUS DOWN THIS PATH OF FORGIVENESS IS TO CHOOSE A DIFFICULT WAY. THERE IS NOT OTHER WAY. IT IS THE WAY OF CHRIST.

. THIS SUNDAY AS THE CHURCH YEAR DRAWS TO A CLOSE, MAY WE LOOK TO JESUS AS OUR LORD AND OUR KING – AND NOT TO THE CAESARS THAT SEEK TO CONTROL AND DISTORT OUR LIVES. MAY WE LOOK TO JESUS AS THE ONE WHO TEACHES FORGIVENESS. AND MAY WE LOOK TO JESUS WHO REIGNS IN GLORY EVERLASTING – NOT ONLY IN THE HEAVENLY PLACES, BUT IN OUR HEARTS, MINDS AND OUR LIVES AS WELL. AS FREDERICK HANDEL SO BEAUTIFULLY WROTE IN THE GREAT ORATORIO OF THE MESSIAH – “THE HALLELUJAH CHORUS”:

“AND HE SHALL REIGN FOR EVER AND EVER

KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.

AND HE SHALL REIGN FOR EVER AND EVER.”

HALLELUJAH! HALLELUJAH.”