

CHRIST THE KING

'I am the Alpha and the Omega,' says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty. Revelation 1: 8

Today, the last Sunday of the Church year, known as Christ the King Sunday. It is also, this year our Ingathering Sunday, the Sunday before Thanksgiving when we ask parishioners to make your yearly financial pledge to the church.

The two events are not entirely easy to reconcile. Christ the King Sunday celebrates the world to come, the world when God's reign of justice will be complete and God's glory will be fully manifest in the world. The language is royal, triumphal.

To God was given dominion and glory and kingship, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve God. God's dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, and God's kingship is one that shall never be destroyed. That's Daniel.

'I am the Alpha and the Omega,' says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty. That's Revelation.

And here's John. Jesus answered, 'My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the authorities. '

And then the hymns: Crown Him with Many Crowns, At the Name of Jesus, Every Knee Shall Bow

So, all very otherworldly, very victorious, regal, God and The Church Triumphant. That's Christ the King Sunday.

But also we have our pledge drive, and our annual Ingathering. Very practical, bottom line, down to earth, this -worldly. How to reconcile these apparently conflicting themes.

Well, let me tell you about a couple of local, down-to-earth, practical victories right here at St John's. As with so much of contemporary life, these small and present glories came in the form of emails. One was to Rob Watters, the genius behind our Angel Food Ministries program. One of our parishioners had most generously purchased a box of groceries to donate to a needy family. Here's the email from the recipient.

Yes, I have received your email and the conformation. I will be there on November 21st to pick up the donated box. Please thank the member of your church for me. My family and I greatly appreciate what you are doing to help us. I'd also like to

thank you for the information and further help for me and my family. I don't know what I can do or say more to thank you. But thank you very much Rob. You are definitely a blessing to me and my family. Thank you once again and please take care. May God Bless you more and more.

Just last night Rob Watters called me about something that happened at the Angel Food distribution yesterday. One of the customers who's been ordering a box every month since we started had ordered two for Thanksgiving. When she came to collect her orders yesterday, she told Rob that she wanted to donate her extra box back to us for someone needy. As it happened, the Care Coordinator for Tuttle House, a transitional housing adjunct to the Pine Street Inn, had called wanting to order a box but missed the deadline. Rob called, and someone from Tuttle House came to pick up the donated box. Rob said, when he told the generous woman giving back her extra box that it would go to a home for the formerly homeless, he and she were both near to tears.

Something is going on here

Here's another email that came to our web page,

Dear St. John's, I attended service at your church for the first time on the 8th. Reverend Fowler gave a sermon about giving to the Church and, well, I'd like to give. I am a video editor and cartoonist. I also have experience using cameras (video and still). If you could use any of those skills, I'd love to volunteer them. Maybe a little cartoon for a bulletin (I would be most interested in doing this)? Or some graphic design work? Just let me know what I can do for you. Thanks for your time.

Something is going on here.

Also, some of you may remember that earlier in the fall I talked in a sermon about my hopes for the next chapter of my ministry here. I said that I'd like to be able to do more counseling: that I hoped people would consider me as a resource when they are working on personal problems with any kind of spiritual dimension (and most personal problems, in my experience, do have a spiritual component.) And, guess what? People have actually been coming to talk to me! *Ask and ye shall receive!* I believe that they are asking me to live out what is my most basic calling as a priest – to give pastoral care – and counseling is pastoral care. And being asked to do what I am called to do is, to me, a gift.

Something is going on here.

People are calling for help, and we are responding. And we are calling for help, and people are responding to us. And *that*, as Bishop John Coburn used to say, snapping his fingers, *That's the Holy Spirit!*

As I've been thinking about stewardship these last couple of weeks, I've been remembering a fellow parishioner from All Saints' Belmont back in the day when I was a layperson there and running the Every Member Canvass. I have been thinking about Donald in particular partly because Sam and I recently attended the wedding of his widow, Mary.

Donald was 25 years or so older than I and I really didn't get to know him until after his first wife died and he married Mary, who was younger than I, but more of a contemporary. Donald was a quiet man, rather non-descript looking and a bit rumped. He was not someone who spoke up much at parish events, he didn't take strong positions in public, and he didn't throw his weight around.

But he could have. He was the head of anesthesiology at Mass General, a very accomplished person even in a community of Harvard and MIT types. Not only that, his weekly pledge was, and I am not exaggerating, more than *ten times* that of any other parishioner. I knew this because I knew all the pledge amounts. And obviously I remember to this day what a discrepancy there was between Donald's pledge and the next highest.

Now, I'm not saying this was a parish of big pledgers, though it should have been. When I asked the rector how much a person should pledge (this was before I began to talk about proportional giving and got my head handed to me on a platter) the rector said, gloomily, "Well, it would be nice if they pledged as much as their Country Club dues." That may tell you much of what you need to know about Belmont in the 1970's.

But Donald understood how much a person ought to consider giving to the church, and he gave that, and far far more. Also, he understood about giving without fear or favor, without expectations, without *quid quo pros*. Another time when I asked the rector why we couldn't have the eucharist more than twice a month at the main Sunday service he said, "There are a lot of Unitarians in the congregation." "But we are an Episcopal Church," I pointed out. "But the Unitarians pay my salary," he told me.

At the wedding Sam and I went to, the remarriage of Donald's widow Mary, Donald's children and their children were present. So were a variety of Donald's nieces and nephews and other relatives I couldn't keep straight. The wedding was, among many other splendors, a testimony to the extraordinarily strong stepfamily Donald and Mary

had created. I seemed to be the only non – family person present who had known Donald before I knew Mary, and every time someone discovered that, they asked me to tell them about Donald. What kind of a man was he?

He was a prince, I kept saying. *He was a prince among men*. And he was. Not just because he gave so generously to the church. But because he gave generously without wanting recognition or special treatment in return. And because, more important, his giving to the church was an outward and visible sign (to me and a couple of others only, those of us who saw the pledge sheets) of his generosity to his family, to the physicians he mentored and guided at the General, and to all of us fortunate enough to come into his quiet gracious orbit.

I lapsed into old-fashioned language when I described Donald as a prince – and language suitable to today’s theme of Kingship. But it was not because, as I have said, he expected royal treatment, and it was not because he was an old-fashioned guy. His second wife, Mary, my friend, is also an anesthesiologist, a feminist, and a leader in cross-disciplinary work with medicine and spirituality.

But Donald was a prince. He just was. And as I thought about this I remembered the cry that echoes throughout that wonderful novel **Cinder Houser Rules**, by John Irving. It’s how Dr. Larch says good night every night. He says, “Goodnight, you Princes of Maine... you Kings of New England.” And what’s so odd, and so poignant, is who he says it to: he says it to all the inmate boys of his orphanage in an isolated village in Maine. These rejects, these unwanted boys, abandoned in the most remote and potentially hopeless of situations, are *you Princes of Maine... you Kings of New England*.

Now that, *that’s the Holy Spirit*. working through the character of Dr. Larch. That’s a little bit of the kingdom of God right here on earth. A kingdom where orphan boys, and unassuming men like Donald, are princes and kings. A kingdom *where the last shall be first, and the first, last*.

We aren’t that kingdom here at St John’s. It would be prideful and wrong to think so. But we catch glimpses of it now and again. We have moments, now and again, of that *kingdom come*. I’ve tried to give a couple of examples, and I’m sure each of you can supply some of your own.

Please, be generous and beyond generous with your pledge this year. We need your help to keep the *kingdom coming*.

Alleluia! Amen