



**Christ the King of Compassion|| November 23, 2025 || 9:30 am St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, Hanover, MA ||  
Proper 29C Christ the King Sunday || Jeremiah 23:1-6; Canticle 16; Colossians 1:11-20; Luke 23:33-43|| The Rev.  
Amy Whitcomb Slemmer, Esq.**

Grace to you, and peace, from God our father and mother, and from the One who gathers the lost, restores the weary, and reigns not from a throne but from a cross. Amen.

This morning we arrive at the very end of our liturgical year, Year C when we are guided and uplifted by the gospel stories found in Luke. We bookend our year by celebrating Christ the King Sunday, the Last Sunday after Pentecost.

Twenty-eight Sundays ago we celebrated one aspect of our triune God, as we marked the gift of the Holy Spirit and the miraculous and dramatic events of Pentecost, when gathered people of different lands, nations and dialects could understand the word of God as though in their native tongue. From there, we spent these months with Jesus, walking through the green, growing season, puzzling over his parables, being rooted in love and reflecting on the many manifestations of that gift, being reminded of what it means to pattern our lives after a Savior whose power is manifest as compassion, justice, and mercy.

Christ the King Sunday, crescendos with a glimpse of who Jesus is, a King who was crucified as a criminal, and whose final breath expresses the power of forgiveness.

Before we turn our attention to Advent, this morning we are offered the opportunity to consider Christ as a ruler of the universe, a counter-cultural leader, an omnipotent being who did not impose his power and authority by force, brutality or violence but rather as the purveyor of compassion, empathy, and love.

Jesus' shocking teachings in the time of Roman rule were not to counter the occupying forces with armies of well supplied soldiers, but to engage a growing band of rag-tag townspeople to pray for their enemies, do good to those who would smite them, to turn the other cheek at every opportunity.

How many gospel stories are infused with the refrain of "who, me?" when Jesus asks folks to follow him, or engages them in ministry and kindness. "Who, me?" I don't even know the scriptures by heart. "Who, Me?" I have to take care of my mother, "Who, me?" I did lousy in school, was a bully or worse. "Who, ME?" to which Jesus calls on his friends and each of us with a gentle – Yes. You. You, your perfect, human, flawed, made in my image and fundamentally good person. You with curiosity and vulnerability. You can be part of Christ's Kingdom. Without you, we can't actually bring about the reign of God, our Compassionate King. Yes, you – willing to ask questions, committed to learning and growing, offering a listening and loving ear to your neighbor. Yes, you, who are uncomfortable sorting out just who your neighbors are, but you show up again and again, and we need you in this community of kindness week after week – Yes....YOU!

And who is this King who needs, expects, invites and implores each of us to follow him?

From the beautiful scripture passage from Jeremiah this morning, you heard him described as a shepherd who is tender, protective and focused on the vulnerable. Our Shepherd King gathers, guides and restores us offering dominion by way of compassion, not coercion but care. What a treat to sing

the echo of these sentiments, in the Song of Zachariah that builds on the image of the tender shepherd to remind us that God visits us – shows up for us – to liberate us from fear. God shines a loving light on those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death and guides our feet into the way of peace. God our King keeps his promises, shows up in love, forgives, restores, rescues and leads us home. This is our King.

If the Gospel reading from Luke came as a shock – I'm with you. I always forget that this scene from Jesus' life is what is offered as the good news underpinning Christ's Kingship. It seems odd to jump ahead to Jesus nailed to a cross, between two criminals with a taunting sign over his excoriated head and think – oh, yes, Christ the King. *Luke's point is exactly this contrast.*

Christ the King Sunday invites us to see that *this*—this moment of unimaginable suffering, vulnerability, forgiveness, and mercy—is the revelation of Christ's kingship. Here, at the place of the skull, we glimpse what God's power actually looks like. And it is nothing like the power of this world. Because right here—moments before death—Jesus reveals the heart of God's reign. The first criminal demands power: "Save yourself and us!" The second makes a much simpler plea: "Jesus, remember me." He knows he has nothing to offer, nothing to claim. All he asks is to be seen by the One who reigns in mercy.

And Jesus responds with a promise that is immediate, intimate, and overflowing with grace: "Today you will be with me in Paradise."

This is the King of Compassion. Christ rules not by overpowering his enemies but by forgiving them. Not by escaping suffering but by entering ours fully. Not by clinging to life but by offering his own life for the healing of the world.

We are repeatedly invited to ask – given these rules of the road, these counter-cultural values, where do we see Christ's kingdom breaking in today, not in strength but in compassion? And I saw it firsthand, all weekend!

I saw it in the kind words offered to friends and neighbors who stopped by our Christmas Fair. I saw it in the comfort offered a frail, unsteady woman who was worried about getting her walker up and down our stairs and THREE people jumping in to help – one carried her walker, one steadied her elbow and, on the way out, one gathered her treasures and helped her to her car.

I saw it in Santa's patient and available presence in this very sanctuary! Christ's Kingdom was ALL OVER our campus this weekend, evoking laughter and familiar anecdotes, warming strangers with generous eye contact and patience. Christ's Kingdom was engaging, attractive, welcoming and deeply moving in the prayers that our guests asked for themselves and for each other. We hosted a guest whose simple prayer was – "pray for the volunteers at this fair. They feel like my friends. Like Jesus."

If you volunteered at this year's Christmas Fair, or if you attended, you answered the "WHO ME?" With – "YES – ME!"

Bless you elves and volunteers, bless each of you who supported this annual event in other ways and bless our visitors who came seeking bargains, weighed down by difficulties, disappointing relationships, grief, loss and the honest to goodness determined search for a bargain! They were met with delicious, homemade food, a listening ear, joyful music and willing, accommodating and available volunteers. And perhaps they found more than they were looking for?!

You were the people God needed us to be this weekend, and what a gift to end the very long Season after Pentecost with such a meaningful and impactful milestone in the life of this church!

Today we end the long Season after Pentecost reminding ourselves that Jesus not the king the world expects, but the king we desperately need, and the king that offers compassion, presence and mercy.

Next week we ring in the new year with the start of Advent, a deeply moving, intimate season of watching, waiting, and looking for God in unexpected places. Between now and then, I hope you will find repeated opportunities to regale friends and relatives – anyone who will listen, really, about the remarkably, faith-filled gatherings that occurred here on Friday and Saturday! Christ the King was all about the place – welcoming, loving, and as we make our way from here today – let us too model the part of God’s Kingdom where each of God’s people is remembered. Amen+