

What If?

Colossians 1:11-20
Luke 23:33-43

Crossroads Christian Church
November 24, 2013 Christ the King C
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Today's the end of the church year. Last Advent, we waited for the birth of Jesus. Then, as the year progressed, we traced his ministry down through the crucifixion on Good Friday and the Resurrection on Easter. Christ's Spirit came on Pentecost, and since then, our Gospel lessons have showed us how Jesus Christ taught us about God's reign. Now it's Christ the King Sunday, the last Sunday of the Church Year, and next week with the first Sunday of Advent we begin a brand new church year, we begin to tell the story all over again.

Christ the King Sunday was first proclaimed by Pope Pius XI in 1925, as an end to the church year, reminding people that Christ was king not by force or coercion, but by love; that Christ is our true king, more so than earthly leaders. Protestants have picked up on the idea, and we too now end up each church year by affirming that Christ is our ruler.

Thom Schuman, a Presbyterian interim pastor from Cincinnati, wrote this poem:

oxymoron

King of kings
Lord of lords
Glory Hallelujah!

really?

are these word just
a neat, peppy praise song,
fun to sing
but empty of meaning?

no kings around here
that i know of,
but a lot of politicians
who act as if folks
are agin' 'em
if you are not with them;

no lords around here
except those who

think they can
lord it over everyone else,
but debt and worry and fear
control my life;

glory seems to be
in short supply these
days,
and hallelujahs
don't seem to mean much
to most folks;

but you

you are a mystery solved
in the impossibilities
of life;
an enigma wrapped
in wonder;
a majesty born
in humility;
a life blossoming
out of death.

and you

you i could follow
forever.

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It got me thinking. What if we really took seriously that Christ is our Lord? What difference might it make, right here in Caseyville, Illinois?

What if?

What if Thanksgiving were more than a holiday, but also a way of life? What if our tiredness, our despair, our grumpiness, our worry, could be set aside, even for a few moments, and we could thank God for the things we take for granted? The breath of air in our lungs; the marvelously intricate chemistry of our bodies working to maintain our health; the strength and support that we receive from loving relationships, with other people, and with God? What if we could move past our desire for more and more stuff to be thankful for the basics, home, shelter, warmth on a cold day, the clothes on our backs, and find more ways to share with those who don't even have

the basics? What if we could be on the sheep side at the time of the great judgment, and heard the Master say,
I was hungry and you fed me,
I was thirsty and you gave me a drink,
I was homeless and you gave me a room,
I was shivering and you gave me clothes,
I was sick and you stopped to visit,
I was in prison and you came to me.'

What if Christians cared more for helping others, transforming lives, sharing God's love and compassion in a hurting world rather than arguing about whose theology is right and whose is wrong? What if?

What if we really believed what Paul said in Colossians, that God "has rescued us from the control of darkness and transferred us into the royal domain of the Son he loves," that "He set us free through the Son and forgave our sins." Doesn't that mean we would start living in a different way, giving our lives to Christ in a far deeper way than we have before? One of the harshest critics and challengers of Christianity was the German philosopher Friederich Nietzsche, who grew up in a parsonage but became an atheist. He was the one who first came up with the phrase "God is dead." He would have been more inclined to believe, he said, if Christ's followers would only act a bit more redeemed. Doesn't that mean that we Christians wouldn't blend into the woodwork so much, that others around us would see us as people with a different set of values, different marching orders, different attitudes?

What if we believed, and acted as if we believed, what Paul said about Christ and the church? "He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the one who is firstborn from among the dead so that he might occupy the first place in everything.

Because all the fullness of God was pleased to live in him, and he reconciled all things to himself through him—
whether things on earth or in the heavens.

He brought peace through the blood of his cross." (Col. 1:18-20)

That would mean that we would think of the church not just as an institution, an organization, and us just as members. Rather, we would be parts of the body of Christ, acting to do Christ's work. We would believe that God dwells in us, not just for our own salvation, but that we might transform the world in light and love. That would mean that our primary business would be to bring about reconciliation—

healing the wounds and divisions that chop up our lives today—reconciling nation to nation, person to person, and people with God. What if we took that seriously? The earliest Christian leaders did. They overturned a world order based on fear by fearlessly proclaiming Christ's gospel in the market places, in the high courts, and in the arenas where they were about to be torn apart by gladiators or lions. They took it seriously. What if we did? Would we get in trouble, too? Or would people just shake their heads and say, "those crazy, do-gooder Christians, what are we going to do with them?"

What if, on Christ the King Sunday, we took seriously our Gospel lesson, where our King did just the opposite of what kings normally do? Instead of commanding that his subjects offer their lives for him, he offered his life for them—for us. Jesus Christ received the worst that the world had to offer, the worst pain, the worst humiliation, the worst hatred, and through love he won. He changed all the rules. And three days later, God would affirm that victory through the resurrection. My favorite New Testament scholar, N.T. Wright, puts it this way, that the cross was "the moment within history when the loving God defeated the powers of evil and dealt with the sin of the world, with our sin, once and for all." (unquote)

What if, the next time that we wanted to zap somebody we were mad at, we remembered Jesus on the cross forgiving those who were doing awful things to him, and we forgave? Or at least, what if we held back the harsh word, the zinger, the putdown, and show caring instead? What if?

What if the next time we were quick to judge the street person as worthless, our political foes as dangerous enemies, the minority group person as a threatening animal or a lazy bum, we remembered Jesus bringing eternal life to the thief on the cross? What if?

What if we realized that what God did through Jesus on the cross and the empty tomb meant that we were worth more than diamonds and gold, that we were of infinite worth in God's eyes, not only us but every human being?

What if this new understanding of our worth and the worth of every human life gave us a new impetus for mission? Then this congregation could give more to mission, and do even more for the needs of the community around us. More of our members would give time and effort to help others in need, and help agencies of the

church bring change to the lives of others. What if? What if we really, really acted like Christ was our King?

What if this new understanding of our worth and the worth of every human life gave us a new impetus for transformative justice—not just retribution and eye-for-an-eye, but economic justice, so that each year we wouldn't add a million or so more names to the poverty level list?

What if this new understanding of our worth and the worth of every human life gave us a new impetus for peace, the kind of shalom that helps us all live together as brother and sister? What if?

Maybe this sounds like so much idealistic twaddle from a dreamy-eyed preacher. Maybe every issue is so much more complicated than I describe, that these suggestions are totally unrealistic. But we'll never know unless we try, will we?

What if we followed Christ on the road of discipleship, learning how to love, how to forgive, how to heal a hurting world, and we actually trusted that we could make a difference? What if?