

2017-11-26 “King, Creator, Judge” – Michael Cheuk
Psalm 95, Ephesians 1:15-23, Matthew 25:31-46

Today is “Christ the King Sunday,” where many Christians throughout the world celebrate and acknowledge the supreme rule of Christ. Today, I’d like to explore three images used for Christ in our assigned scripture readings: King, Creator, and Judge.

The first image we have for Christ is “**King.**” In our Epistle reading, Paul talks about God putting great power into work in raising Christ from the dead and sitting him at God’s right hand in heavenly places... far above all rule and authority and power and dominion. And in our Psalm reading assigned for today, the people of God proclaimed: “For the LORD is a great God, and a great King above all gods.”

In the divisive world of today, we are tempted to pledge our allegiance to many lesser gods. We are tempted to divide the world into two camps of opposing allegiances. That kind of thinking is called dualistic, either/or thinking. We human beings are tribal people who like to label others as “in” or “out.” Christ the King can help us move past this dualistic thinking by making this theological point: we *all* are under the feet of Christ.

The second image we have for Christ is “**Creator.**” Christ is the Word that created everything into being. In our first reading today, the psalm writer wrote: “O come, let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker!” If Christ the King suggests that all human beings are one under the rule of Christ, then Christ the Creator reminds us what the mystics of old have always taught: that **all of creation is one, brought into being by one Maker.** From the majestic galaxies billions of light years away to the smallest quarks and leptons, everything – including human beings – are created from the same materials. In fact, Dr. Brian Cox, a British particle physicist and professor at the University of Manchester argues that all matter in the universe is unique and responsive to the actions of all other matter. In other words, in layperson’s language, “Everything is connected.” View Dr. Cox’s explanation here: <http://change.is/video/everything-is-connected-brian-cox>. For centuries, Christian mystics have argued against a dualistic thinking of human beings vs. the rest of creation. Instead they advocated a non-dualistic insight: we are *one* with creation, and that God is above all, through all and in all (Eph. 4:6). Therefore, what we do and how we live not only has profound effects upon the world, but upon ourselves and our neighbors as well.

Finally, in our third reading from Matthew, we see an image of Christ, coming in glory as the Son of Man as “**Judge.**” So what are we make of this image of Christ whose damning judgment seems to undo the forgiveness and grace that Jesus demonstrated throughout the rest of his life and teaching? In this parable, the enigmatic Son of Man initially engages in dualistic thinking by dividing the people of the nations into two groups: sheep and goats. At the end of the parable, a harsh judgment is imposed on the “goats” and the “sheep” are rewarded. So how can we understand this parable from the perspective of non-dualistic thinking?

Roman Catholic priest Richard Rohr explains the parable in this way. He argues that dualistic thinking – when done well – is an important and necessary predecessor to non-dualistic thinking, especially when it comes to matters of justice. Rohr says, “Note that Jesus reserves his most damning and dualistic statements for issues of social justice where humanity and power is most resistant . . . Let’s bring it home: the United States always has all the money it needs for war, armaments, and military bases, but never enough for good schools, low cost housing, universal health care, or the humane care of immigrants. No wonder Jesus dared to be dualistic and damning first! Our capacity for blindness here seems infinite.”¹

¹ Richard Rohr, “Responding to Vengeful Scriptures,” Friday, May 15, 2015, <http://myemail.constantcontact.com/Richard-Rohr-s-Meditation--Responding-to-Vengeful-Scriptures.html?soid=1103098668616&aid=4c30QaEQaLY>

Rohr reminds us, “You’ve got to name good and evil and differentiate between right and wrong. You can’t be naive about evil. But if you stay focused on this duality, you’ll go crazy! You’ll become an unlovable, judgmental, dismissive person. You must find a bigger field, a wider frame, which we call non-dual thinking.”²

So how can we see this parable in a wider frame, not with dualistic thinking, but with non-dual thinking? I think the clue is in the words of the Son of Man: ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’ The hungry, the thirsty, the naked, the stranger, and the prisoner, ... these are often the “others,” the “powerless,” those who are treated as mere “objects. We often judge them to be the “not to be believed,” the “troublemakers.” They are the target of either our contempt or our pity. From a dualistic mindset, they are often seen as a “problem” in need of a solution.

But the non-dual mindset sees them with compassion. They aren’t the “other.” No, Jesus said, “whatever you do to one of these, you do it to *me*.” That’s because Christ the King cuts across all dividing lines separating those who are “in” and those who are “out.” The hungry, thirsty, naked, the stranger and imprisoned who are a part of God’s creation, surely they are also “one of us.” In our dualistic mindset, we see everyone *else* making bad decisions, being immoral, acting short sighted, prejudiced and irrational. But once we put on our non-dual lens, we come to realize that *we’re* everyone too.

Furthermore, theologian Peter Rollins says that things or people we consider to be “problems” might actually be telling us important truths about ourselves. Suppose you have chronic fatigue and think *that’s* the problem. But if we actually listen and pay attention, our fatigue may be trying to tell us about an unhealthy relationship or unhealthy work life. Paul, when he was Saul, thought Christians were the problem. So he started persecuting them thinking that getting rid of Christians would solve his problem. While on the road to Damascus, Saul received a vision of Christ, who asked: “Saul, why are you persecuting me?” Whatever Saul did to those Christians, he did it to Christ. The growing Christian community was a message telling Paul that there was a problem in the Jewish religion of his day...and out of that, Paul found the solution in the good news of grace. Closer to home, there are also “problems” in our community and we think: “If we only get rid of certain people, we’d be fine.” So we put them behind bars, behind walls, we cut them off. But what if those “others,” those “goats,” are simply *symptoms* of a greater sickness in our society and our world? What if they are trying to tell us something? We think that when we go to the prison, we’re good news to the prisoners. But what if in reality, when we visit prisoners, the homeless, the hungry, the immigrant refugees, they are good news to us because the Christ within them is telling us that there’s a problem in our social body that we’re not looking at?³

When we read this parable in a non-dualistic way, whatever is done to the “goats,” is also done to Christ! Right after Jesus tells this parable, Matthew records this in chapter 26: When Jesus had finished saying all these things, he said to his disciples, “You know that after two days the Passover is coming, and the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified.” In other words, Christ the Judge will be judged by a world that will reject him as “other.” The Lamb of God will be condemned as a scapegoat and executed by an unjust judicial system. Therefore, Christ the Judge will always be in solidarity with all those who also have been falsely accused, punished and scapegoated by an unjust system.

This parable is interesting because in the end, what Christ wants is for his disciples to love everyone in Christ’s creation. According to this parable, what ultimately counts is not what we *believe*, but what we *do* for others.

In the end, may we both believe in the love of Christ, and show the love of Christ to all, because Christ the King, Creator and Judge is above all, through all and in all. Amen.

² Richard Rohr, “Contemplation and Action,” Friday, May 13, 2016, <http://myemail.constantcontact.com/Richard-Rohr-s-Meditation--Contemplation-AND-Action.html?soid=1103098668616&aid=t9UAmg6CdBU>

³ Pete Rollins, interviewed by Rob Bell in his Robcast, Episode 112, “Pete Rollins on God, Part 2” around minute 30.