

So here we are, outside the Sunday before Thanksgiving.
While the rest of the world is talking turkey,
we just heard about sheep and goats.
It's the last Sunday of the church year, the culmination of our journey with Jesus,
celebrating the reign of Christ as king

Christ Jesus is a king unlike any this world has ever known.
Not enthroned in riches and splendor,
but poured out for others in radical love and service.
A crown not of jewels, but thorns.
Hands not extended to kiss his ring,
but stretched out, wounded, on the hard wood of the cross
to draw all creation to himself.

That's the kingship we celebrate today.
That's the kingdom where we are citizens, even now.

Christ the King is fairly recent, as far as feast days go.
Initiated in 1925 by the Pope as a direct antidote to the rise of nationalism and fascism --
Mussolini in Italy and, later, Hitler in Germany.
To proclaim Christ as King, is to say that Christ is supreme
above all powers and principalities, practices and prejudices, of this world.
To say that Christ is supreme above all,
has real-world consequences here and now.

Last year I said that I'd been thinking about the message of Christ the King
for our time, and concluded that dismantling white supremacy
was a most urgent calling for us as Christians.

So much has changed so profoundly since then.
Who could have imagined we'd be observing this day outside our beautiful church,
or that more of us would be watching on YouTube or TV than in person?
Back then we didn't know how to livestream,
didn't know that would soon become our liturgical lifeline.
We'd not heard of COVID-19.
We'd not heard of George Floyd or Breanna Taylor.

Yet that truth of Christ the King proclaimed last year (and before) remains the same:
 If we believe that Christ is supreme above all, then nothing else can be.
 There is scarcely anything more contrary to our Christian faith than white supremacy.

I bet that when you think of white supremacy,
 I'm not the first person who comes to mind.
 But I'm coming to terms with the bracing fact that I, and frankly most of us,
 benefit from it.
 I'm trying to be more aware of just how many advantages I have because I'm white.

Oh, I can rationalize that I'm just a girl from a little town in WV,
 I'm in the first generation of my family to finish college,
 and I've worked hard for everything I've managed to scrape together. All true.

It's also true that being white has propelled me along the way.
 I didn't have to look around a sea of pale faces the first day of high school,
 as one of my classmates did,
 and say warily, "I'm the only one who looks like me. Again."

I've never had to give my son "the talk" that African American families must have.
 The only time my son has ever had a run-in with the police?
 When he was walking down the street at night with his friend Joe --
 and even as a middle schooler he knew why they were singled out.
 You know why: Joe's black.

And, yes, in this time of pandemic that has upended all our lives,
 we have, sadly, had a number of folks associated with the parish infected with the virus.
 But we have not to my knowledge had anyone die of COVID-19, thank God.
 Knowing that communities of color are disproportionately impacted by the virus,
 and have higher mortality rates in general,
 I seriously doubt that we could say this if we were not
 an overwhelmingly white congregation.
 The things we take for granted...

God only knows how many times a door has swung open for me,
 the benefit of doubt given, a preference enjoyed --- not always overtly, but subtly --
 because I happen to be white.

But God does know all that and more.

And I'm praying that my eyes and my heart will be opened to learn,
to repent, to make amends.

It's the least I can do if I dare profess Christ as King with any credibility.
What are we as Christians here for but to profess that Christ alone is supreme?

In today's gospel, we heard the story of the sheep and the goats
that comes near the end of Matthew's gospel,
right before the dark-skinned man Jesus
is unjustly arrested, tortured and killed by civil authorities.
Jesus describes a scene of coming in glory to separate the sheep from the goats,
the sheep entering the kingdom prepared before the beginning of the world,
and the goats – not.

Sometimes this is portrayed as an ominous parable of judgment.
But Jesus isn't saying anything different from what he's already shown by his actions
throughout the gospel.

Feeding the hungry. Welcoming the outcast. Caring for the sick.
Identifying with the least, the vulnerable, the marginalized,
the most discriminated against.
That's who Jesus is.
That's who we are as we claim him as king.

I read this passage not in fear of how Jesus may judge me someday,
but how I judge myself right now.

I make judgements, every day in real time, about how I choose to treat others,
how I vote and engage as a US citizen, what I read and watch and think about,
the jokes I laugh at and the language I use, how I spend my time and money,
who and what I pray for.

I choose, I make judgement, every day in real time,
if I'm going to let my white supremacy go unchecked;
if I'm going to let myself be defensive about it.
Or if I'm going to choose to make Jesus Christ alone supreme,
in word and deed, and not just on Sunday.
You, too, make the same judgment.

By the grace of God, may we choose wisely. Humbly. Faithfully.
Daily.

#