

The St. John's Pulpit

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THE HARVEST OF YOUR RIGHTEOUSNESS

Second Corinthians 9:6-10

Christ the King Sunday/Financial Commitment Sunday, November 20, 2016
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Above Jesus on his cross, the Roman guards attached a sign. According to Pilate's direct instructions, they wrote these words in Hebrew, Latin and Greek: "*Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.*"¹ And, for the past 2,000 years, humans have been debating whether the punctuation at the end of that phrase is an exclamation point or a question mark. Ultimately, we punctuate that phrase with the commitments expressed in our living.

Jesus never called himself a king. In fact, when people tried to make him a king, he walked away. However, every year, on this Sunday prior to Advent, the last Sunday of the Christian calendar, all around the world Christians celebrate, '*Christ the King Sunday.*' This day was instituted by Pope Pius XI, in 1925, as he saw the rise of dictatorships throughout Europe. He saw Christians confused about the authority of Jesus in their lives. He watched as people gave more authority to political alliances and leaders of state than to Jesus, as Lord of their living. As these dictators attempted to assert authority over the Church, Pope Pius XI instituted the Feast of Christ the King who is to have first allegiance.

At the conclusion of this election season, we should remember why we do not have an American flag in this sanctuary. This is because we do not gather in this room as Americans. We gather in this sacred space as part of the people of God in this world. We are committed to following the teachings, lifestyle principles and practices of Jesus. We are part of the tradition called Christian. God has ultimate authority in our lives. Jesus is Lord of our Active Faith. For us, the sign '*Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews*' is punctuated with an exclamation point, not a question mark.

While Jesus never desired to be an earthly king, he spoke a great deal about the kingdom of God. He explained the kingdom of God to be like a party to which everyone is invited. And, Jesus taught that the price of admission to this wonderful party called the '*kingdom of God,*' is that you must become like a little child. You must become humble before God and choose the way of the cross – serving God by serving others through your commitment to learn of Jesus and follow Jesus. We call this Active Faith. For us, there is no other commitment that precedes or precludes our commitment to follow Jesus.

Over the years, I have noticed that people basically live in one of two ways; they either adjust or they commit. People who make adjustments usually do so with a downward or a backward move based on pessimism or fear. Yet, commitment is always an upward or forward move based on hope and faith.

Today, we complete our Season of Spiritual Renewal. We have focused on recommitting ourselves to see the world through the eyes of Jesus who calls us to be in relationship with the Lord of the harvest (vertical) as we invest ourselves in the harvest of the Lord (horizontal).

Today, you have placed your financial commitment cards on The Lord's Table. We do not call these financial adjustment cards. Next Sunday, we will gather around this same Lord's Table for communion remembering God's commitment to us and Jesus' sacrificial love for us. Today, on this Christ the King Sunday, we renew our commitments to follow Jesus as living sacrifices continuing the ministry of God's kingdom through St. John's. We live as committed stewards of God's blessings.

In Paul's words to Christ's Church in Corinth, he encouraged them to express their commitment to God in their finances. He uses the Jewish scriptures of Proverbs 11:24 and Deuteronomy 15:10. These passages teach us to sow bountifully, not sparingly, in God's kingdom; willingly rather than grudgingly or under compulsion. He says the Lord will increase the '*harvest of your righteousness*;' in other words, 'the Lord will increase in fruitfulness of your relationship with God.'

Let me tell you about the day Mother Teresa was surprised. She learned of a family with eight children who had not eaten for several days. So, she took rice to the family. The mother of the family received the rice with gratitude and humility. Then she divided the gift of rice into two piles. She poured half of the rice back into the bag and walked out of her small dwelling to the door of her neighbor. She gave half of the rice to her neighbor explaining to Mother Teresa, "*They are hungry also.*" What surprised Mother Teresa was not that this mother shared her rice. She had become accustomed to this practice of love among the poor. What surprised Mother Teresa was that this woman was a Hindu and her neighbor was a Muslim.

For you, friends, that sign on the cross; '*Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews,*' is punctuated with an exclamation point!!! Active Faith is more than an adjustment; Active Faith is your commitment! In these days, you are sowing seeds for next year's harvest. And your Active Faith is the harvest of your righteousness. Let those who have ears to hear listen for the voice of the king. Amen and AMEN!

¹ John 19:19

² Reported as part of an article, 'Reaching Out in Love,' in *Continuum*, 2000, p 32-33.