

Gracious God, open our ears that we may hear your truth, open our eyes that we may see your kingdom, and open our hearts and minds that we might know the cries of our brothers and sisters who are hungry, and hurting, and sometimes even dying without the knowledge of your love for them. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts together be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

There is a wonderful scene in the movie *A Few Good Men*. It is the climactic point in the movie as Tom Cruise, playing the role of Navy Lawyer Lt Dan Kaffee is questioning Marine Col. Nathan Jessup, played by Jack Nicholson in the court martial of 2 enlisted men for murder of Private William Santiago. Now, Kafee believes that Jessup actually ordered the event that led to the death and is trying to prove it on the stand in a tense exchange. When Kafee finally tells the Colonel that he wants the truth, Colonel Jessup explodes “You can’t handle the truth!”

How are we with the truth?

Can we handle it? Especially if it is a truth that we really don’t want to hear?

A few weeks ago, we held our Charge Conference jointly with the representatives of Ft. Oglethorpe, Flinstone, Simpson, and St. Elmo United Methodist Churches. A member of the St Elmo congregation shared his musical gift with us as our organ came to life for the first time in many years. When we came together, we talked about and celebrated the good things that have happened in this second year of our ministry together. We also acknowledged that there are some things that we didn’t do well. And although we didn’t dwell on the areas where we fell short, we needed to acknowledge their existence.

Attendance is not where any of us would like it to be. I don’t know that we’re doing anything wrong, per se, but it would be nice if everyone would show

up at the same time. And we could all do a better job of inviting folks to come and worship with us.

Participation in activities outside of worship can be sketchy at best.

Yet, we do desire to reach out and be helpful to others in the name of Christ. And that's a good thing.

We celebrated our outreach to the community through the Free Store and the Wednesday night Bible Study, through our sponsorship of the food box at Rossville Elementary, our coat drive for the children and other ways that we are seeking to reach out to the community. We also talked of ways that we might work together to meet the needs of the community for Christ - through programs like the Transformation Project, a recovery ministry being introduced by Justin Keating, the pastor at Ft. Oglethorpe and Flintstone, for example.

Today we celebrate the feast of Christ the King. This is a relatively new day in the liturgical calendar. Established by Pope Pius XI in 1925, as Europe was still recovering from the effects of World War I, as the fermentation that would lead to Hitler in Germany, Mussolini in Italy and Stalin in the Soviet Union was taking place, Pope Pius XI established this date as a day to declare to all that the Kingdoms of this world were nothing in comparison to the King and Kingdom that is to come. It is a day that declares that Jesus is King of Kings and Lord of Lords and that the day is coming when every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess that fact. It is celebrated on the last Sunday of the Liturgical calendar as we prepare to once again enter the season of Advent and receive the Good News of a Savior being born to us in a humble stable... God with us, taking on human form, experiencing the human emotions of joy and sorrow and finally experiencing the human reality of death so that we might experience eternal life.

This year, because of a quirk of the calendar, we will also take time to remember the Thanksgiving holiday that is coming up this Thursday and we will live up to our vow to support the church with our prayers, our presence, our gifts, our service, and our witness as we present our pledge cards indicating our support of the church budget in the coming year.

As we conclude our series on “What Disciples Do,” we return to the very heart of what it means to be a disciple: to follow. “Following,” by definition, means not being first, not being the leader, not being in charge. This can be a very uncomfortable thought for many of us. Americans value independence and self-sufficiency. We like feeling we are in complete control of our lives and destiny. However, as we see in today's text, disciples willingly give their ultimate allegiance to Jesus Christ, king and ruler over all creation.

Colossians 1 affirms an extremely high Christology. The text speaks of Christ's “glorious power” and speaks of “the kingdom of God's beloved Son.” Jesus is the “image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.” Jesus is the “head of the body, the church.” Finally, Christ is to “have first place in everything.” In short, Jesus is the king of all creation, reigning over the universe, the church, and individual believers. Although this is ultimately an eschatological hope, disciples still attempt to make Christ their king here and now. Therefore, disciples of Jesus Christ boldly and willingly profess their ultimate allegiance not to self, family, or country—but to Jesus Christ the King.

Martin Thielen tells about a teacher who, while cleaning out her attic, came upon a cross she purchased years earlier. It was a crucifix—a wooden cross with a silver image of Jesus hanging on it. She put the cross on her home office desk and left it there for several days. However, she needed some space to work, so she laid the cross on top of her checkbook and her bills. It made her think about how her faith should impact her finances. If her money were really

under the cross of Jesus, what would she buy? What would she not buy? How much would she give away? How much would she keep?

A few days later, more papers accumulated on her desk, so she put the crucifix on top of some papers she was grading for her students. It made her think about how her faith should impact her work. If her job were really under the cross of Jesus, how would she treat her students? How would she treat her colleagues? How would she prepare for her classes?

A few days later the cross ended up on top of some recent photographs of her family and friends. It made her think about how her faith should impact her relationships. If her relationships were really under the cross of Jesus, what kind of wife would she be? What kind of mother? What kind of grandmother? What kind of friend?

For several weeks that cross lay on her desk, and it seemed to ask her, on a daily basis: "What difference does my faith make in my life? What impact does my religion have on my finances, my job, and my relationships?" In short it asked, "What would it mean for me to truly make Christ the King of my life?"

A search of the New Testament for the word "king" yields some interesting results. The vast majority of the references to Jesus as king occur during the Passion narratives in the Gospels. Jesus' kingship is proclaimed multiple times while he is on the cross. Although vindicated through his resurrection, the cross is still a primary defining point of Christ's Kingship. The Son of God became human and died a horrible death on the cross to release his subjects from captivity. The King of the World, the Lord of Glory made this ultimate sacrifice out of his love for the world, a world constantly in rebellion against him. Christ's kingship is not like a king with a jewel-encrusted crown in purple finery on a gold throne wielding an oppressive rod of iron. Rather, he is the crucified God with a crown of thorns hanging half naked on a cross of shame to set us free from our bondage.

"Jesus said, "I am the way, the TRUTH, and the life...."

Friends, the concept that we must understand is this: the Truth is not a "what," ... it's a "who". Jesus is the Truth, not a theory about him, not a teaching about him, not a doctrine about him (as important as those are for us). Ultimately they ALL fall short, and we are left with "Jesus only".

Fortunately, Jesus is enough.

Jesus is enough to fulfill all of our needs...perhaps not our wants and desires, but all that we need is found in Jesus and the sacrifice that he made for us.

Jesus is enough to give us salvation and eternal life. He is the mediator between us and the Father. His sacrifice for us was the ultimate in love.

Jesus is enough because there is nothing that we can do to deserve the gifts of grace that we have been given. There is nothing that we can do to earn salvation. It is a gift, bought and paid for with the sacrifice that Jesus made on our behalf.

A sacrifice made out of love. Love of the creator for the created.

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

As we close this liturgical year on this Christ the King Sunday, I pray that we will decide to make Jesus Christ the centerpiece of our lives. Let us give in to his call to serve with boldness and compassion the last, the least and the lost. Let us model the admonition to feed the hungry, welcome strangers into our midst, provide clothing and shelter to those in need, and visit the sick, the lonely and the prisoner. Let us do as St Francis suggested when he told us to "preach the gospel always, use words only when necessary."

This Jesus that we worship wants all that we have and all that we are. If we accept him as our king, our lord and our savior, then we owe him all that and more. For he has paid a great price for us...a price that we can never repay.

Thanks be to God. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.