

Christ the King 2021

On the last Sunday of the liturgical year, we celebrate Christ the King.

By “king,” we do not mean autocrat, of course.

We mean Christ the unifier, the one under whom we all are brought together—people with various gifts and interests, quirks and shadow selves.

It is our shadow self, or, more exactly, how we relate to it, that keeps us from wholeness.

The shadow self, according to Jung, is the part of us that we keep hidden even from ourselves.

It could be an aspect of us that is impulsive, angry, wounded, or sad.

Although it is an integral part of our personality, we shut our eyes to it and its potential as a source of great emotional richness.

Jung encouraged us to acknowledge our shadow selves as a way of growing—not by getting rid of it, but by integrating it into our conscious lives.

Our anger, for example, can fuel meaningful activity if we acknowledge it.

When we deny it, on the other hand, it comes out sideways.

It controls us without our awareness.

The result is a divided self, part conscious and part disowned.

Uniting those two without shame or fear brings healing, wholeness.

When we are uncomfortable with difference within ourselves, we are uncomfortable with difference in others.

If we accept our own shadow self, in other words, and embrace wholeness, then we can more readily accept various aspects of other people's personalities.

Conversely, if we are threatened by our own selves, we will be threatened by others.

A divided self spreads division.

We therefore pray in the collect today, "Mercifully grant that the peoples of the earth, divided and enslaved by sin, may be freed and brought together under his most gracious rule," that is, under the rule of the one who unites.

Wholeness with others starts with unity within ourselves.

It is true that we are all at war within ourselves.

It is not that we must put aside that conflict, but that we must acknowledge it, acknowledge our own private battle.

That which we deny controls us.

When we can admit to ourselves without shame or fear that we, like everyone else, have these struggles, then we are freed from their control.

Any journey starts where we are.

When Jesus is interviewed by Pilate, he seeks to understand where Pilate stands.

He questions Pilate, “Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?”

In other words, “Where is this coming from? Is it something that troubles you, or is it something that troubles others, which in turn troubles you?”

Pilate responds caustically, “I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?”

From his answer, Jesus recognizes that Pilate is concerned primarily with exterior matters.

He just wants to make things quiet again, so he is not truly interested in what Jesus has done, but in what that has occasioned.

Pilate goes about things backwards.

He looks for peace outside himself so that he can have peace within himself.

He reminds me of a woman who once said to me with a straight face that she would not be so depressed if other people would just change.

When such people try to force others to conform to their own standard, division results.

Peace, wholeness, starts within.

It would be wasted for Christ to answer Pilate saying, “I have told the truth and made people uncomfortable. I have showed them a different way of being that undermines the power of the Jewish religious elite who keep them frightened, anxious, and divided.”

Pilate could not use that information to force some kind of external order.

Jesus therefore opts instead to try to communicate to Pilate simply that he is not in competition with him.

“My kingdom is not from this world.”

Christ is not engaging in an external battle, but an internal one.

Pilate does not understand that there is an internal battle to be waged.

As one who externalizes, Pilate uses fear, shame, and anxiety to control others.

Pilate himself is, in turn, fearful of the emperor.

If word gets to Rome that there is a disturbance in Jerusalem, it could affect his career.

With all this focus on external power, who has time for truth?

Or, as Pilate puts it in the verse that directly follows today’s reading, “What is truth?”

All Pilate grasps from what Jesus says is that he does not categorically deny being a king.

“So you are a king?” he queries.

Jesus again attempts to set him straight.

“You say that I am a king.”

That is to say, “Your words, not mine, Pilate.”

Jesus came not to gain external power, but “to testify to the truth.”

This truth of which Christ speaks is, moreover, not some doctrinal truth, some theological proposition.

It is not an external truth that tells us how we ought to be.

It tells us how we are, and that is something that even most Christians get wrong.

It is the truth of our being.

By admitting to ourselves the fullness of our being, we can embrace it—the conflict, the shadow self, the whole self.

That is what it means to love ourselves, in all our complexity, without fear or shame.

We do not *become* whole; we embrace the wholeness that already exists.

In embracing ourselves, we can then love others, accept others as they are.

Those who grasp the truth that Christ teaches experience healing and spread unity.

When we embrace ourselves fully, we can embrace others fully.

This is why a tax collector like Matthew and a zealot like Simon are able to sit down at table together.

Christ does not engage in external power struggles; he unites.

He is a different kind of king.

It is the difference between someone who makes us feel accepted for who we are and someone who makes us feel like we need to change to match some ideal.

It is the difference between someone who makes us feel hopeful, and someone who makes us feel anxious.

When we embrace the fullness of ourselves, we can embrace others, as well—Christ the King, Christ the unifier.

He shows us the only way to wholeness.