

# CHRIST THE KING SUNDAY

Proper 29 - Year C

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## Jeremiah 23:1-6

**23** Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! says the Lord. <sup>2</sup>Therefore thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, concerning the shepherds who shepherd my people: It is you who have scattered my flock and have driven them away, and you have not attended to them. So I will attend to you for your evil doings, says the Lord. <sup>3</sup>Then I myself will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the lands where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply. <sup>4</sup>I will raise up shepherds over them who will shepherd them, and they shall no longer fear or be dismayed, nor shall any be missing, says the Lord.

<sup>5</sup>The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. <sup>6</sup>In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will live in safety. And this is the name by which he will be called: "The Lord is our righteousness."

The Prophet Jeremiah writes a scathing rebuke of the shepherds of ancient Israel. The passage uses poignant agrarian language to describe the relationship between spiritual and political leaders as shepherds and the people as sheep. The shepherds of Israel have a unique responsibility, caring for and protecting their flock, ensuring the well-being and health of the flock, providing moral and spiritual leadership and guidance. Yet Jeremiah admonishes the shepherds who have abandoned their jobs of leading ancient Israel. The people are lost without the shepherds' leadership. It is at this inflection point that Jeremiah reminds the people that God will provide a shepherd who will rightly shepherd all of Israel.

## Discussion Questions

Like the Georgian shepherds guiding their flocks through valleys and peaks, our spiritual journeys also cross varied terrain. When have you most clearly experienced God's guiding presence along your path?

## Commentary from Milton Gilder

There is a unique relationship between a shepherd and flock. For city-dwellers and suburbanites, we most likely do not encounter shepherds or sheep in our daily lives. In the country of Georgia, shepherds and sheep are a familiar sight. There is an ancient tradition in which shepherds embark on a 15-day trek, moving their flocks with the changing seasons from the lowlands in the winter to the highlands in the summer. A team of shepherds moves thousands of sheep along a path through sun and rain, rivers and streams, cities and towns, cars, and predators. As you can imagine, some sheep do not survive, some lose the herd and are later found, and some give birth to new life. What stands out: the shepherds do not merely shepherd one sheep but shepherd them all through the vicissitudes of the journey from the lowlands to the highlands.

In seasons when God feels far away, what helps you remember or rediscover the Shepherd's care?

## Canticle 16

Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel; \*  
    he has come to his people and set them free.  
He has raised up for us a mighty savior, \*  
    born of the house of his servant David.  
Through his holy prophets he promised of old,  
that he would save us from our enemies, \*  
    from the hands of all who hate us.  
He promised to show mercy to our fathers \*  
    and to remember his holy covenant.  
This was the oath he swore to our father Abraham, \*  
    to set us free from the hands of our enemies,  
Free to worship him without fear, \*  
    holy and righteous in his sight  
    all the days of our life.  
You, my child, shall be called the prophet of the Most  
    High, \*  
    for you will go before the Lord to prepare his  
    way,  
To give his people knowledge of salvation \*  
    by the forgiveness of their sins.  
In the tender compassion of our God \*  
    the dawn from on high shall break upon us,  
To shine on those who dwell in darkness and the  
    shadow of death, \*  
    and to guide our feet into the way of peace.  
  
Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy  
    Spirit: \*  
    as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be  
    for ever. Amen.

## Commentary from Milton Gilder

Canticles are psalm-like hymns or songs taken from biblical passages, typically chanted or spoken during the liturgy of morning or evening prayer found in the Daily Office of the Book of Common Prayer. Yet today, in an unusual case, we have a canticle in our lectionary which your congregation may very well recite as part of its Sunday service. In this canticle, the Song of Zechariah, Zechariah praises God during the naming and circumcision of his infant child, John the Baptist. We must not forget that it has been nearly nine months since Zechariah last spoke, since being silenced by the angel Gabriel for doubting in his old age the conception of John.

Zechariah's only form of communication had been a writing tablet, and now, with the restored power to speak, one easily could imagine he had much to say about the nine months he was mute. But no, remarkably, Zechariah focused on the immediacy of his son's birth and began to praise God. We do not know all that Zechariah said, but the Song of Zechariah gives us insight into the nature of his praise. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, Zechariah praises God for the birth of his child, whom he believes will be a mighty savior for the first-century Jewish community living under Roman occupation.

## Discussion Questions

In the BCP, canticles are often responses to Scripture. How does Zechariah's song teach us to respond, not merely to hear, but to join the chorus of praise?

What have seasons of silence, voluntary or imposed, taught you about listening and trust?

## Colossians 1:11-20

<sup>11</sup> May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, so that you may have all endurance and patience, joyfully <sup>12</sup> giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light. <sup>13</sup> He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, <sup>14</sup> in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

<sup>15</sup> He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation, <sup>16</sup> for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. <sup>17</sup> He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. <sup>18</sup> He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. <sup>19</sup> For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, <sup>20</sup> and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.

## Commentary from Milton Gilder

Christ is King! Christ is King! Christ is King! Christ the King Sunday is not an ancient feast, but a modern celebration introduced by Pope Pius XI a century ago. Faced with what Pope Pius regarded as a destructive force of the modern age, secularism, Pope Pius proposed a liturgical response to honor the Kingship of Christ: Christ the King Sunday. He did not intend the feast to be one merely of private devotion but rather to serve notice to nations and political rulers “to give public honor and obedience to Christ” (Pope Pius XI, *Quas Primas*, 1925).

Who is Christ the King? For Pius in the 1920s, Christ the King was to be honored and glorified. Christ the King will execute justice on those in power who fail to recognize him in the public square. For Saint Paul, the apostle writing to the first-century Colossian church, Christ the King is God made visible, from whom all things were created through Him and for Him, the head of the church, and it is through Him that God executed reconciliation of all creation by Jesus’ death and resurrection. Both Pope Pius and St. Paul portray Jesus as a benevolent magistrate who executes justice and promotes peace, permeating every facet of creation.

For you today, who is Christ the King? This question is germane both to our personal devotion to Jesus Christ and to who we imagine Jesus is in our churches and in the public square.

## Discussion Questions

When you hear the phrase “Christ the King,” what emotions or images arise for you? How has your understanding of Christ’s kingship changed over time?

Pope Pius XI envisioned *Christ the King Sunday* as a reminder that our faith is not private alone. How might your actions or choices this week demonstrate Jesus’ love?

## Luke 23:33-43

<sup>33</sup>When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. [[<sup>34</sup>Then Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”]] And they cast lots to divide his clothing. <sup>35</sup>And the people stood by watching, but the leaders scoffed at him, saying, “He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!” <sup>36</sup>The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine <sup>37</sup>and saying, “If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!” <sup>38</sup>There was also an inscription over him, “This is the King of the Jews.”

<sup>39</sup>One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, “Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!” <sup>40</sup>But the other rebuked him, saying, “Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?” <sup>41</sup>And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong.” <sup>42</sup>Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come in your kingdom.” <sup>43</sup>He replied, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

## Commentary from Milton Gilder

Have you seen the medieval depictions of Jesus as king? He is shining in glory, crowned as a European monarch carrying a scepter and orb. He is richly appareled in white and red robes. His right hand is raised, with his pointer and middle fingers extended, demonstrating his power. You can see the faint markings of his crucifixion on his hands. This passage from the Gospel of Luke presents a contrasting image of Christ the King; this Jesus has no trappings of grandeur or nobility. This Jesus sits nailed to a cross, broken and marred. A court of criminals and Roman soldiers surrounds a pleading Jesus, who appears to have no power to stop their mocking provocations. It is all too easy to sanitize the gruesome nature of Jesus’ crucifixion or be quick to identify with a triumphant Jesus. Yet images of a sanitized and triumphant Jesus are persistent and ubiquitous – all you have to do is open the newspaper, turn on the television, or open any social media app to hear and see the public discourse, policies here and abroad being drafted in triumphant Jesus’ name that further marginalize the poor and oppressed. Luke’s Jesus, too, is Christ the King – disabled, powerless, and rejected. Christ the King has conquered sin and death and is now seated at the right hand of God the Father. And, too, our king bears the deep wounds of imprisonment and crucifixion by an unjust political system.

## Discussion Questions

How might the image of the disabled and powerless Christ challenge you to reimagine how you see and experience Jesus?

Where in your life or in the world do you see Christ reigning from unexpected places of weakness?