

Almighty and everlasting God, whose will it is to restore all things in your well-beloved Son, the King of kings and Lord of lords: Mercifully grant that the peoples of the earth, divided and enslaved by sin, may be freed and brought together under his most gracious rule; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Have you woken up in the morning recently and wonder how did it get to be November already? Do you remember those oppressively hot day we had this summer and now it's 28 degrees. This year has gone by so fast.

Thanksgiving week is upon us. I like thanksgiving. It's that great time of year when families get together and gather around for a meal and hopefully some family love. Your house this year may be full of people or just a few. Maybe you're off to someone else's home. It might be a huge feast with all the extras, or a Stouffers Turkey Pot Pie. It really doesn't matter. The purpose of the day, whether in a crowd or simply by ourselves, is to give thanks. But not just any thanks. The purpose is to give thanks to God for our blessings, the big one and the small ones; ones from our past, and those of the present, and the ones that God is planning for our future.

Here is a statistic for you that you may or may not know. When tracking travel of more than 50 miles, Thanksgiving weekend is the busiest travel time of the entire year. And after people arrive at our homes, or we arrive at theirs, and we are invited in, usually one of the first questions asked is, "How was your trip?" And what we typically get back in response, with smiling faces that tell us how happy they are to have reached their destination, is a report of their travel from there to here. You know what I am talking about, right? The journey is completed. There were ups and, maybe, a few downs. But along the way we kept happy because we knew where we were heading. We knew our destination and now that we have arrived, joy abounds. At least that is what we hope for.

Did you know that we have something like that journey in our church? It takes place every year. It has a beginning point. It has ups and a few downs along the way. It has a destination that brings us to a realization of something bigger than our everyday lives, something of great joy. And the end-point of that journey is today. It is called Christ the King Sunday. It's that white Sunday sandwiched in between green and blue when we get the chance to consider the previous year and connect to the joy of the reality that has become apparent.

So, how was your trip? Do you remember your trip?

Well, we have traveled a long way so let me take a second to reminds us. Our journey for this year began in 2015 on November 29th, the First Sunday of Advent. The initial part of our journey was a time when we were encouraged by John the Baptist to prepare the way for the coming of our Savior. Along that early way, we met Mary, as a young virgin girl, who had been visited by an angel and, as a result, accepted her role, her call to a Godly mission, that was so much bigger than she could have ever imagined. We encountered Joseph and heard about his dream, the census proclaimed and their family's returned to their ancestral hometowns, and finally we witnessed the birth of a child on Christmas Day, God Himself in human form, sent into the world to give us a path back to who God had made us. You remember it, right, along the way?

On our way here, the child grew into a man and we watched him embrace His mission through baptism and a wilderness experience. On our journey, we experienced with Jesus ups and downs. Miracles and challenges. His lessons and teaching and often our hard-headedness and confusion. We came to know Him better as he walked on water, brought sight to the blind, called Lazarus out of the tomb, and shined bright on the Mount of Transfiguration. You remember that along the way, right? We also saw our human missteps in Peter taking his eyes off Jesus on the sea, the disciples arguing who was the greatest, the people of Nazareth trying to throw Jesus off a cliff, and Saul holding the coats of those stoning Stephen. Is it all coming back to you now?

Towards the end of our journey we saw Jesus cleanse the Temple of the merchants, conduct a final Passover meal and wash the feet of those who were there, sweat blood in a garden, be tried and convicted on false charges, hung on a cross, buried in a tomb, and rise from the dead. Man, talk about a journey!

And after all that, along with so much more, we now come to Christ the King Sunday, the completion of our annual journey, recognizing that the Kingdom of God really has come and Christ is our King.

You know, looking back over the past year we have seen a lot in order to fully discover who this Savior of ours is. Prophesied Messiah, tiny baby, powerful teacher, and compassionate pastor. He is a love spreader, a truth giver, and a life sacrificer. And ultimately He is the Son of God and the King of our lives.

So how has your trip been? Would you say that you have a better understanding of Jesus and His mission today than last November 29th? Have you been able to recognize Jesus at a deeper level? Have you been able to embrace the child, follow the mission, and be transformed by the cross? That's is what the goal is. That is the destination that we have been traveling towards. But, whether your answer is yes or no, don't worry. The good news is that starting next week we get to do it again, as God, through His church, gives us all another chance to make the trip to grow deeper in our relationship with Him through His Son.

Christ the King Sunday. It gives us all the chance, at the end of our annual journey, to once again recognize the fullness of Christ within the Kingdom of God. We get to put it all together again and again, year after year, having walked with Jesus from birth to death to resurrection so that we can finally proclaim that Jesus, the risen Christ, is indeed the King and Ruler of our existence.

But that is not all of it. I know that it seems like our journey has been solely to discover who Jesus is, but there is another journey that we have been on. I wonder if we have recognized it. There has been another complimentary journey we have been taking, beyond the quest to know Jesus more fully as our Savior and King? As a matter of fact, unless we complete that second part of our annual journey, Christ the King Sunday becomes just an intellectual exercise. It becomes another theological term paper to show that we have done the reading or listened to a few of the sermons. That other journey, which also ends at Christ the King Sunday, is about a different identity. It is a journey that brings us to the recognition of who... we are.

It is a journey that looks back to a garden and a choice made that broke a relationship with our Creator. It is a journey that led us out of bondage into faithfulness, out of faithfulness into exile, and back round again, and again, and again. On our journey, we were given law by Moses and warnings by prophets and eventually a child in a manger. Along the way, we were told of our need for repentance, we were shown that simply following the law was not the path to salvation, and we were given a glimpse of God in the flesh as our Savior. It was, and is, a journey in order to see who we are, so that we can embrace, through Christ and His sacrifice, who we are supposed to be.

Christ the King Sunday gives us the chance to recognize two different identities. Christ as our King and us as His subjects. We can't have one without the other. So, how has that part of your journey gone?

When we sit down this Thursday around the Thanksgiving table, whether it's in a crowd or in solitude, whether there's a turkey on the table or something more simple, let's remember to give thank for both our King as well as for the privilege we have to be His faithful subjects.

Amen