

## TAKING IT BACK

### Colossians 1:11-20

#### Intro

Prior to the listing of the lectionary readings in the plan calendar that I use is a bolded title. For the last six months or so, the bolded words have declared it to be “such and such’ Sunday after Pentecost’. Today, however, is listed as, the ‘Reign of Christ the King Sunday’.

I know: not one of the big Sunday’s on the Protestant calendar. But the reason that it exists has stood out to me for a while. Here’s the background.

The celebration was instituted by the Roman Catholic Church back in 1925 with the hope that it would cause people to reflect upon whom they should owe their loyalty. It’s a question that is still as relevant today as it was 91 years ago. Think about it: as we gather here between an election that has only highlighted the divisions that do exist in the midst of our country, and the holiday season that will begin to scream in so many ways, ‘make sure you get what you want’ (to the point that there is currently an ad running that changes the name of Thanksgiving to...thanks-getting), where does our allegiance lie? Is it with Jesus, or is it somewhere else? The scripture reads this way.

### **Colossians 1:11-20**

<sup>11</sup> May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, while 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.

### **“Taking It Back”**

Prior to writing this sermon I was looking at the headlines on the homepage that I frequent. As I watched the headlines roll by, I had a moment of pause as a new section showed up. It’s title? ‘Shopping’, and the first two stories contained in it were the following: ‘How to Prepare for Black Friday Like a Pro’, and ‘Items You Shouldn’t Buy on Black Friday’.

Now it would be real easy for me to think and say, ‘well, here we go again’, but then, as I drove to the High School on Wednesday night, I was reminded just how ingrained this sort of sentiment has become. I say this because I drove by the new Costco and saw every single parking spot taken, cars parked all over the freshly hydro-seeded ground, and people walking to their vehicles that were parked in the High School lots. There were cars (and people) everywhere, all of them trying to stock up on things that they

may need for Thanksgiving, and absolutely trying to beat the crush of the Christmas shopping that happens in the latter hours of turkey day, through all of the hours of the day that is to follow...by partaking in a crush of people the week prior. I don't know: does that seem ironic to you?

So it's with that backdrop, writing a sermon connected to a day labeled, 'The Reign of Christ the King Sunday', that I inevitably thought to myself, "well isn't this an interesting confluence of dates." (Makes you wonder doesn't it, when people are able to get up and go at all hours of the day and night to go stand in a line to buy stuff, but say that making it to church on a Sunday morning is just way too difficult. But I digress.)

The thing is, the rationale of Pope Pius XI (all the way back in 1925) for why such a day was needed sounds like it could still be articulated today. He said, "gradually the religion of Christ came to be likened to false religions and to be placed ignominiously on the same level with them. It was then put under the power of the state and tolerated more or less at the whim of princes and rulers. Some men went even further, and wished to set up in the place of God's religion a natural religion consisting in some instinctive affection of the heart."

So there's the contextual foundation. The consequence is stated this way: "The rebellion of individuals and states against the authority of Christ has produced deplorable consequences. We lament them today: the seeds of discord sown far and wide; those bitter enmities and rivalries between nations, which still hinder so much the cause of peace; that insatiable greed which is so often hidden under a pretense of public spirit and patriotism, and gives rise to so many private quarrels; a blind and immoderate selfishness, making [people] seek nothing but their own comfort and advantage, and measure everything by these; no peace in the home, because [people] have forgotten or neglect their duty; the unity and stability of the family undermined; society in a word, shaken to its foundations and on the way to ruin."

Now before you think that I have converted to Catholicism, I have not.

In the same, breath, I recognize that Spirit of God can speak truth through many different avenues and the Catholic Church has absolutely been one of those places.

While the language used has the rhythm of a bygone era, what Pius recognized in the society of 91 years ago sounds, at least to me, frighteningly like the here and now. You could change some words, maybe take a few out (the joy of an economy of words) and what you have is a sentiment that many, I would hope almost all of us, would be able to hop aboard without any trouble at all.

What Pius recognized, which is what we have been reiterating in very scriptural ways over the last two Sundays, is that we need to stand up for the One whom we profess to be the king of our lives because if we do not, then the faith-filled practices that we have come to celebrate will be co-opted by the secular societies of which we are a part, and made little more than opportunities to have our own selfishness gratified.

For example, gift giving at Christmas...is not a bad thing! Depending on how you read the stories found in the Gospels, you could actually think of gift giving as scriptural.

But there are way too many ways (way too many ways!), when what has been created is anything but.

And it isn't just Christmas or Easter.

For too long Christians have either stood idly by, or actually assisted in the dismantling of their faith traditions. This needs to stop. We need to stand up and declare where our allegiance lies. We need to declare in our words and actions that Christmas is about Christ the King, and that while we are celebrating a national holiday, what we are recognizing in that day is the birth of our savior, and not an opportunity to get something we want at a little less money, or to imply get more of what we want (regardless of the money that is spent!). We need to take it back and the best way that I feel that we can do that is by standing up for the One we say that we believe in, the One whom we profess to follow. We need to stop being ashamed of our faith. Stand up for it and take it back from those who would like to create one amalgamated day of celebration!

One of the great parts of Reformed theology is that it is based in covenant, or promises made by one to another to one another. We experienced this truth in the baptismal liturgy as Ryan and Mya promised to raise their son Nikolaj, in the faith so that he might "be [Jesus] disciple, follow his way, and show his love." They promised.

Then you, the congregation, makes the promise to, "welcome the new disciple into the household of God; do you promise to share with them the good news of the gospel; and do you promise to pray for and work toward the well-being of children everywhere?"

While much of that promise is centered around Nikolaji in particular, another part of it is focused toward all children, toward the entirety of the world: do you hope to share the good news of the gospel with all people, with all children everywhere? If you answered this question in the affirmative then I ask you this question: how can you hope to share the good news of the gospel if you are unwilling to stand up for Christ the King during the season which leads up to the day when we celebrate his birth?

In order to share the gospel we need to stand up for and declare the truth that we profess to believe in. We need to make Christmas more than just a day to satisfy our most selfish of desires: we need to make it a day, and the weeks leading up to it a season, when everyone we come into contact with is able to know what we believe. We need to act and speak in such a way that the glory of Christ the King is proclaimed. In doing so, we might actually be planting the seeds of faith that will, in God's time, ultimately grow into faith.

I know that we are still a week before the actual start of Advent, the four weeks prior to Christmas, but on this Christ the King Sunday it seems wonderfully appropriate to stand up, as a community of faith, and say that this holiday season is about lifting glory Jesus. Let us make that stand. Let us stand up for Christ the King!

### **After Sermon Prayer**

Holy God, in these days of secularization it is so easy to forget why we gather at all: to lift praise to Christ the King. God, as we enter into this season of Advent, we pray that our words and actions declare what You have led us to believe, that this is a Merry Christmas and a time to celebrate the birth of a king. It is in his name that we do pray. Amen.