



Reign of Christ – November 22, 2009
Ezekiel 34: 11-16, 20-24; Matthew 25:31-46.

A homily preached by the Rev'd James J. Popham

Today we observe our patronal feast, the Reign of Christ. It may lead us to ask what would the world look like if Christ did reign.

The readings today are instructive and not particularly difficult to interpret. They lay out for us a world in which Christ reigns, a world of compassion, where we will love God when we give food to the hungry, drink to the thirsty, clothes to the naked, welcome to the stranger, care to the sick, and company to prisoners. None of this is new or different. But whether we do these things is the difference between eternal punishment and eternal life, between a world where Christ reigns and a world where we reign.

But you and I cannot as individuals feed all the hungry, care for all the sick, provide clothes for all the impoverished, welcome every stranger, or visit every prisoner. We can hope our fellow human beings will step up and do their share. And then we might, indeed, banish hunger, homelessness, loneliness, and engender the reign of Christ.

But, of course, we live in a world that is not so simple. Not everyone pitches in. So problems like feeding the hungry and caring for the sick are so massive that they no longer can be left to us mere individuals. So we create and rely on institutions like non-profit charitable organizations, even churches. ... but the primary institution in this day and age for addressing society's ills often is government.

And how government should go about its business – what we should expect, even demand, of our government is the subject of this morning's reading from Ezekiel.

Ezekiel is railing against bad government. Now this was an era of kings, and a good king was like a good shepherd. And a good shepherd cares for the sheep. But the kings in the Davidic line were not good shepherds. They had led their flock astray, turning away from God, worshipping false Gods. Caring not for the poor, the weak, the hungry, the thirsty. Enriching themselves. Turning a blind eye to justice. And Israel was conquered and its people sent into exile. The sheep were scattered. Bad government led to bad consequences.

We do not have a monarchy and theocracy like that of the time of Ezekiel. We live in a parliamentary democracy. And living in a country with a representative form of government, we bear great responsibility for what our government does.

I am not here to tell you that the conservatives, the liberals, or any political party or faction necessarily has the answers. The problems we face defy simple solutions. But our values must inform our political decisions. We hardly may quarrel with what God asks of us - that we provide our neighbours with food, drink, shelter, even health care – that's for my friends south of the border. We know better than to tolerate governments that tolerate injustice. We know better than to embrace a government that embraces the strong and ignores the weak. We know better than to empower governments that empower the powerful and disenfranchise the marginal.

Ezekiel's admonition was clear. The consequences of our apathy, disinterest, or neglect of the weak, whether by us personally or the government we elect will fall upon us.

But if we see that even the weakest among us have food, drink, shelter, comfort, and companionship. If we assure the oppressed and the marginal suffer no injustice. We will be loving God. We will be doing for Jesus Christ what we did for the least of God's children. And we will be engendering the reign of Christ.

Amen.

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