

**“Christ Is Lord”**  
**Sermon by Pastor Tom Warren**  
**Peace United Church of Christ**  
**November 23, 2014**

Today is, on the lectionary calendar, technically the end of the year. It is the culmination of starting with Advent, which we do next week. The year begins building up to the birth of Christ. This is technically the end of the lectionary year. Everything that we have learned of Jesus and God culminates into our understanding that Christ is Lord and King of all creation.

When I told my professors at school that I would be preaching the “Christ is Lord” sermon from the Old Testament, they said “Clearly, you learned nothing in Homiletics. You’re not supposed to put Jesus back into the Old Testament. You’re supposed to bring Him into the New Testament and leave God in the Old Testament”, but that is beside the point, and they are not here, so that doesn’t matter!

What does it mean that Christ is Lord? What does it mean when we say Christ is King of all creation, that He is Lord?

When I was a child, I remember one day when I was 4 or 5 and I was playing checkers with my mother, we got into an argument about whether America should have a king. I couldn’t understand why we would elect someone for only 4-8 years when no one would be able to accomplish anything in that amount of time. If someone was given a lifetime to rule and no hindrance from Congress (which I somehow, at 4 or 5, knew was not very effective), think of all the good they could do. Despite my mother’s attempts to explain the importance of democracy and why we have come to this system of government, I was a stubborn child and, to stay true to my belief (at least for an hour), President George H. W. Bush should be made king, mostly based on the fact that he was an old man and all the kings I knew were old men which made sense. Of course, I didn’t understand at the time anything about politics or the corrupting power, or corrupting influence of power, or the reasons we put limits on the powers that our leaders have. No matter our political affiliations or beliefs, we have felt let down, at times, by politicians in this, and every, country—whether from corruption, action or incompetence.

In the Chapter of Ezekiel that this passage comes from, God decries the fall shepherds of the Hebrews who have prospered from the people’s suffering and not done what a shepherd should do. These shepherds are the kings of Judah and Israel, whose actions have led to the destruction of the kingdoms and to the Babylonian exile. In the passage we read, God declares that He will go out and fix the problems of the fall shepherds and will do what they should have been doing all along—bringing back the scattered sheep, healing the wounded and feeding the hungry. God will then install a Good Shepherd to watch over the people from the line of David, who will act as a shepherd should.

We Christians today understand that Good Shepherd to be Jesus Christ, Messiah and Anointed One, Son of man and Lord of creation. Christ, the Good Shepherd, comes to rule not just the Hebrews but all of creation with justice and care, but Christ’s kingship is not expressed as a human kingship. This is not what the Hebrews were picturing when they were waiting for their Messiah.

In Jesus’ time, many people believed that the Messiah would come with power and might, and many viewed that power as the kind that Rome had that nations still have today. They believed that the Messiah would come in force with armies beside Him, ready to combat Rome

and any invader and free the Hebrew people. That opinion has not changed for many today, for many still believe that, with Christ's return, He will come with armies to battle either another human foe or Satan. While the enemies have changed, the belief still carries an understanding of power, as we in the world understand it, one based on force. Christ did not gain His kingship from earthly powers or in earthly ways as we would expect other men and women to do.

One of my favorite quotes about Jesus actually comes from Napoleon, of all places, and it addresses just this topic. It goes like this: "I know men, and I tell you that Jesus Christ was no mere man. Between Him and every other person in history, there can be no comparison. Alexander, Caesar, Charlemagne and I have founded empires, but what did we rest the creation of our genius upon? Force. Jesus Christ founded His Empire upon love and, at this very hour, millions of men would die for Him. The men and women who have built and ruled empires upon this earth do so using force—armies, navies, economic power—but Christ built His empire on love—love of God and love of other, and has not love been shown to be the rock upon which good things are built while force and wealth are but sand, and everything built upon them washes away with time? Do not all earthly empires, no matter how forceful, eventually fall away?"

When the fall shepherds ruled Israel, they built their rule upon force, and eventually their empire was destroyed by Babylon, which later was destroyed by Persia, and Persia was later destroyed by another, and so forth and so on. God's kingdom is not a kingdom of space or lands but a kingdom of people, and I think this is where the true difference lies. Whereas empires of this world force their reign upon others through external forces, God's reign manifests itself inside each person and we give ourselves freely to be a part of God's kingdom. The kingdom we want to belong to, the kingdom of Christ's rule, is not one based on forcing people to accept it but it is one that we accept out of love, but if we turn to Jesus and God and declare Christ is Lord, what does it mean?

When early Christians first began using "Lord" to claim that Jesus Christ was King of creation, it was not just a theological understanding. It was a political one as well. There were four common uses of the word "Lord" in Jesus' day. The first was a term of respect for a superior or teacher. The second was used by slaves to address their masters. The third was to refer to gods, even the God of Israel, and the fourth was a title for the Roman Empire, so when we say, even today, that Jesus is Lord, there are still religious and political implications that come with this claim.

If it is true that, in Christ there is no Jew or Greek, no slave or free, no man or woman, and that we are all equal, then His lordship means that a slave owner is not Lord. It means that the husband is not Lord. It means that other gods are not Lord, and it means that Caesar is not Lord. Christ's lordship is not putting another layer of hierarchy above us. Christ's lordship frees us because if there are no other Lords but Christ, then we are second-class citizens no more, then we are members of a weaker sex no more, then we are slaves no more. Christ's rule doesn't mean we are slaves. It means that when the world tells us that we are not as good as other people, when society tells us that the rich and powerful are better, we can say back that no one stands above us but Christ, that no one rules us but Christ. Our Lord, Christ, acts as King and Shepherd with us.

The image of Shepherd became an important symbol for Christ because it was, and is, a radically different way of understanding leadership. Christ does not take from His people and rule from afar, gathering power and wealth for Himself. Christ acts, not as a human King but more like a servant, taking it upon Himself to help His people. He does not command, but leads by example. He does not take, but instead gives.

When God addresses the fall shepherds of Ezekiel, the charge laid against them is that they have not shepherded and ruled the sheep justly. They have profited and taken from the sheep, not healed them or protected them, not given them shelter and not gone after the lost. They were poor rulers because they were not servants of their people.

A good shepherd is many different things to his flock. A shepherd is their guardian and protects them from wild animals and thieves. A shepherd is a healer and will take care of the sick and bind the wounded. A shepherd is a provider, giving them good grass to eat and a safe place to sleep. A shepherd is a leader and guides them from the barn to the field and back again every day. A shepherd is the savior of the sheep that wanders too far away from the flock and cannot find its way back. Not all sheep need to be rescued or bandaged, but to each, the shepherd is an important part of their lives—perhaps one they take for granted sometimes.

In trying to understand what Christ means for us, I feel many of us gets stuck when we try and state that Christ is just one thing. Some of us needs a savior, others a healer, some a friend, others a parent. Some need Christ to lead them while others need Christ to help them determine where to go next. Sometimes we can start to believe that others don't understand Christ because they don't experience Him as we do. We must understand that Christ knows how to help us. The way Christ operates in one person's life may not be the same as in another's life, but that does not mean that he or she is any less important.

In Ezekiel, God's care for us is like a shepherd's care. It is no surprise that the image of the Good Shepherd is the image that God takes for Himself, for the image of the Good Shepherd, just as in Jesus' ministry, is based on the need for, and the undertaking of, justice and compassion. Like every part of Christ's ministry, He invites us to take part in these actions. Christ calls us to act as a shepherd to our neighbors and friends—binding the wounded, giving shelter, and finding the lost when we are able. Jesus does not lead by command, but by example, and we would be wise to follow it. Amen.