

THE TEMPLE TEMPLATE
Sermon, November 20, 2022
Christ the King / Thanksgiving
Texts: Luke 21:5-19; John 2:18-22; I Peter 2:4-12

Some of you may remember Christ the King Sunday was first established in 1925 by Pope Pius XI. In that same year 1925 in Italy, Benito Mussolini had just claimed the title, "Il Duce", declaring himself dictator and was pursuing his fascist program designed to recapture the glory that had been ancient Rome's (*hint for those who don't know ... it didn't work; Italy was plunged into chaos*). In the year 1925 in Germany, Adolf Hitler's manifesto *Mein Kampf* was widely distributed throughout the German nation, and National Socialism was fast on the rise. In that same year 1925 in Russia, Lenin had died and Trotsky was exiled, and Josef Stalin was in full power establishing the Communist "utopia" of the Soviet Union. The same Stalin who is infamously quoted as saying, "*Those who cast votes decide nothing. Those who count votes decide everything.*" It was in that year 1925 that George Bernard Shaw was compelled to write: "*If the other planets are inhabited, they must be using the earth as their insane asylum.*" It was into that tumultuous political climate of 1925 that Pope Pius XI sent his encyclical *Quas Primas*, which established the commemoration of Christ the King Sunday we celebrate today. As Pius XI witnessed the rise of these power hungry tyrants, these self serving leaders with their grand designs and lofty utopian promises who were actually leading people to destruction and chaos. He wrote in paragraph 19 of *Quas Primas*: "*When once men recognize, both in private and in public life, that Christ is King, [then and only then] will society at last receive the great blessings of real liberty, well-ordered discipline, peace and harmony.*" That's the original vision of Christ the King Sunday we commemorate today. To proclaim Christ as King. And if Christ is our King, that means we openly, consistently, visibly and honorably serve Him wherever and however we can and endeavor to be people of integrity, truth and honor, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.

It's also Thanksgiving Sunday. The hymn we just sang will be sung in many churches today across the country. Originally, it comes from England; "Harvest Home," also called "Ingathering," was a traditional English harvest festival roughly similar to our Thanksgiving. We have adopted this and other thanks-themed songs from other nations in our national observance of Thanksgiving ... for example, our first prelude "We Gather Together" comes from 16th century Holland, and is a Dutch expression of gratitude to God celebrating freedom from years of Spanish oppression. "*Let All Things Now Living,*" is a Welsh tune ("*The Ash Grove*") but the lyrics were made in America ... composed in 1939 by Missouri born Katherine Kennicott Davis, a graduate of Wellesly College (*also the composer of Little Drummer Boy, bar rump pa pa pum*). And our final hymn, which will not be "*All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name*" (*as incorrectly listed in the bulletin*); but WILL be "*Now Thank We All Our God*" (*which is correctly included in our hymn insert*) comes from the Germans. As mentioned in years past, "*Nun danket alle Gott*" is a command in the original German, as if to say, "*Now thank God, all of us, no matter what!*" As many of you will remember, this hymn was composed under dire circumstances, in war and plague ravaged Eilenburg, Germany in 1636.

*Come, ye thankful people, come, raise the song of harvest home:
All is safely gathered in, ere the winter storms begin,
God, our Maker, doth provide for our wants to be supplied:
Come to God's own temple, come, raise the song of harvest home.*

That last line of the first stanza of our previous hymn reads, "*Come to God's Own Temple, Come.*" Here's a quick little theology quiz: Just where is "God's own Temple?" (*And don't say it's on the side of His forehead.*) Jesus alludes to "God's own Temple" in our second Gospel reading; and Peter elaborates on this theme in our final reading. The physical Temple of Jesus' day was one of the great wonders of the ancient world. It was a massive structure covering forty to forty-five acres and a tremendous symbol of national pride. This Temple was a renovation of the second Temple built in Haggai's time in the fifth century BC; the first Temple was built by Solomon but destroyed by the Babylonians (*as mentioned two weeks ago*). King Herod was determined to match and even surpass the glory of Solomon's original Temple by massively re-doing this second Temple. Beginning in 19 BC, Herod set to work on an ambitious and massive Temple renovation; the renovation was finally completed some eighty-two years later in 63 A.D. Over ten thousand laborers were involved in the renovation; it was indeed the buzz of the town and probably the

major source of employment there for the better part of a century. At the time of the Gospels, the renovation work was a little over half way done ... it had been going on forty-six years. The smallest stones in the walls of the massive structure weighed as much or more than the car you drove here this morning; two to three tons each. The larger stones weighed up to fifty tons and more!

In our reading from Luke, Jesus and His disciples are at this Temple in Jerusalem, and Jesus tells them this magnificent, massive structure would, in fact, one day come falling down. *"Not one stone will be left on another;"* He said, *"every one of them will be thrown down."* And about forty years later, that happened. In 70 AD, the Temple did come down; again, just seven years after Herod's 82-year long renovation was finally finished in 63 A.D. The Roman general Titus, with 80,000 men, set siege to Jerusalem; it was a difficult city to take, set on a hill, and defended by fierce fighting. When the siege was successful and the city taken, Titus ordered that the whole city and the Temple be leveled, utterly destroyed. The historian Josephus, who was actually there, tells us 97,000 residents of the city were taken captive and over one million died. As some of you know, a portion of a retaining wall of that Temple, called the Western Wall or the Wailing Wall, remains to this day. This is the most holy prayer spot for the present-day Jewish faithful. It really is a moving and inspiring place to be; there are people praying at this holy site 24/7; in fact, you can even access a live camera feeds via the internet.

Back to our second Gospel reading, John 2 – Jesus replied, *"Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days."* They scoffed back, *"It has taken forty-six years to build this temple thus far, and you are going to raise it in three days?"* But, John explains for us, *"... the temple He had spoken of was His body. After He was raised from the dead, His disciples recalled what He had said. Then they believed the Scripture and the words Jesus had spoken."* So ... just where is God's own Temple? Well, Jesus intimates it is found in Him. Bear with me while I risk getting into the theological "weeds" for a moment; it's an abstract but important concept to grasp. The function and purpose of a Temple is to provide a place where people may encounter God. The Bible tells us that in Jesus' incarnation, we see the perfect encounter between God and humanity fleshed out, Jesus provides the true "meeting place" between God and His people. Where do people encounter the living God? In Jesus Christ. And in His body, He is the new Temple. Not to mix metaphors, but He is also the new Temple. The dictionary defines "template" as a mold, a pattern, a model for others to copy. The New Temple is also the new Template, in that Christ our King is the perfect "pattern," the model for us to try and copy and imitate and emulate and honor in our own lives.

If you remember from two weeks ago, the people of Haggai's time were getting ready to rebuild the ruined Temple that had stood four centuries, built by King Solomon, and flattened by the invading Babylonians. Speaking through His prophet, God told them in so many words, *"One day the glory of the new Temple will far surpass that of the old. But for now, don't be discouraged! Be strong, be strong, be strong and go to work! FOR I AM WITH YOU."* (This theme was carried in the last two sermons; copies in back). Scholars believe that veiled in that promise of a glorious new Temple to come is a prophecy of Jesus Christ Himself, as Jesus somewhat cryptically remarks in John 2. A temple, Peter goes on to elaborate, made up of "living stones." This is a grand Temple that will grow to extend throughout the entire world, not just forty-five acres in Jerusalem; this new Temple will be a "place" in which God's Spirit dwells, with Christ as the cornerstone holding it all together. The new Temple isn't limited to the single human body of Jesus Christ ... the new Temple is what the New Testament calls the "body" of Christ, the church ... THAT'S where God's Spirit dwells and fills the whole world, bringing the good news of God's redeeming love in Jesus Christ in word, deed and action. You and I and all the communion of saints are living stones in that ever-growing temple of God. Now, THAT'S a glorious Temple! This is the imagery used by Peter: *"As you come to him, the Living Stone, rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to Him, you also like LIVING STONES are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood ... you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praise of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light."* By faith we are part of that Temple, that Body of Christ; living stones, sticking together, built up in Christ and called to be living, breathing, rock solid, faithful people declaring by word and deed *"... the praise of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light."*

It's a bit of a mixed metaphor, the Temple Template. But it works for me! As Christ is our King, that means He is our ultimate Template, our ultimate Model; and we honor Him as King as we openly, consistently, visibly and honorably try to imitate and be like Him wherever and however we can by actively serving Him as people of integrity, truth and love, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.

And as we do, we become living stones in the ultimate Temple, the Body of Christ.