

**Last Pentecost  
Christ the King  
November 24, 2019**

**In the name of the God of all creation,  
The god alive in each of us as God was alive in Jesus,  
And the power of God known in the Spirit.  
Amen.**

This is our last Sunday of Pentecost Season, the Sunday before our national holiday of Thanksgiving, and a week before Advent begins in our countdown to Christmas. Turkeys are selling fast, shopping centers are already decorating for Christmas, the Lights of St. Augustine were lit last night, families are already buying trees, and the big box stores are all set for Black Friday.

For Episcopalians, Roman Catholics and other churches that follow the *Revised Common Lectionary*, this last Sunday of the Pentecost season ... which is also the last Sunday of our liturgical year ... honors "Christ the King." This is a relatively new entry to the Christian calendar. It was 1925 ... less than 100 years ago ... that Pope Pius XI introduced the feast with an encyclical. His papal letter summarized the Bible's teachings about the kingship of Christ and set this as the day to remember it.

However, St. Cyprian's remembers Christ the King Sunday for another reason. It was thirteen years ago today that a large group of parishioners left St. Cyprian's and the Episcopal Church and affiliated with the Anglican Church in America over the issue of gays and lesbians in the life and leadership of the Episcopal Church. When they departed, the schismatic group took everything in the church that wasn't nailed down. Bishop Howard asked Pastor Deena Galantowicz to step into the void and manage the crisis, which began with recovering the liturgical items that rightfully belong to the church ... not the factional congregation. With only a handful of devoted parishioner ... Dr. Israel, John Miller, and Pastor Deena are the some of those who are still here of that small group ... and they scraped by looking at an unknown future, but faithfully trusting in God to lead them.

In the months following the split, there was no way to imagine the St. Cyprian's we know today. Reeling from this near-fatal event the questions ... theological, emotional, and practical ... were always looming. How does a community of faith recover from such a devastating event? Who is going to pay the bills? What do we do with our feelings of betrayal ... betrayal by the people with whom we shared the Holy Sacrament of Communion? Where is God leading us? To what are we being called?

It may have felt like a death for those who were left behind in this sacred space. In many ways, it was. It was certainly a death to a way of being the community called St. Cyprian's. The breakaway group named themselves Christ the King Anglican Church. Interestingly, it remembers the day they left the Episcopal Church, not the day they gathered as a new

community. However, this death of the old was also the opening for something new for this community of faith ... even if it was painful.

As with any crisis, there was a time where survival was the primary focus. However, that faithful remnant of parishioners at St. Cyprian's stayed for reasons deeper than just loyalty to the Episcopal Church. In their reading of the Gospel they saw unity, not division ... they saw inclusion, not judgement ... they saw diversity as an asset ... and they saw the face of God in every individual. It was that understanding of their faith that bound that small group together, and opened the door for new opportunities.

A lot has happened at St. Cyprian's in the past thirteen years. We have come a long way from the crisis that faced the congregation then. But, in many ways, the schism was a watershed point for who we are today. This story is about this congregation ... but it is also about me. A year after the split I was looking for a church and showed up at St. Cyprian's. I believe that God led me to St. Cyprian's to meet my need ... and it has met many of the needs of this community of faith as well.

My first visit to St. Cyprian's was a few weeks after my mother died late in 2007. I had retired earlier in the year, moved to St. Augustine, and then traveled frequently to Asheville, North Carolina to visit my mother who was in hospice homecare. I had just finished a three-year stint as interim Priest-in-Charge of a conflicted congregation in western Massachusetts. It had been a difficult assignment ... putting out fires that had been smoldering for years ... healing new and old wounds ... cleaning up messes ... encouraging emotional intelligence in the midst of dysfunction ... and getting the congregation ready for a long-term rector. When I left western Massachusetts the last thing I wanted to consider was involvement in another church. But, what I wanted, and what I needed, turned out to be two different things.

At first, I was just another soul in the pew, while another priest led the congregation. That was important for me ... it gave me time to catch my breath ... and it gave me time to listen. I heard about the pain of the recent schism, and when the small congregation seemed to stall in its recovery, Caren and I were invited to step in to explore possibilities for the future. In retrospect, I realize that I was being called to leadership in this congregation not just for the sake of St. Cyprian's, but for my sake as well.

So, finding St. Cyprian's was part of the healing of my soul. To be very honest, this ... THIS ... is not what I had imagined. Yet, freed from the normal expectations of priestly leadership, I felt liberated to share my understanding of the Gospel ... an understanding that includes every person as a beloved child of God. In many ways it was as if we ... the small congregation and I ... were painting on a blank canvas. We heard the Gospel ... we lived the Gospel ... and others came to join us in our community of faith. Together we healed.

I am the Vicar of St. Cyprian's. That means I am appointed by Bishop Howard to serve as the priest to this congregation ... vicariously for him, the Bishop. Yet, St. Cyprian's is all of us together. Whether you are a newcomer ... or you have been here a few weeks or a few months

or a few years ... or even if you have been a part of this congregation since before the schism ... you are part of this faith community. We are one body ... different talents, different abilities, different resources ... but all focused on sustaining our life together. We have accomplished much in 13 years ... much more than any of us every expected. But, this not about past accomplishments ... it is about who we are today.

I've mentioned that it was the Last Sunday of our Pentecost Season. I've mentioned that it is Christ the King Sunday. It is the Sunday before Thanksgiving and Black Friday. And by the way ... it is also the occasion of my annual Stewardship sermon. However, I think I'm going to this part of the sermon a little differently this year.

We have just completed an extraordinarily successful capital fundraising campaign ... Beyond the Commons. Our goal was \$100,000, and we raised \$185,000 in pledges and gifts. Yet, there are still the routine bills to pay ... insurance, utilities, supplies, maintenance and upkeep, and support to the Diocese among other things. Those routine bills are paid for out of our annual operating budget support by your annual pledges and your weekly offerings. So, after Thanksgiving we will sending you a letter and a pledge card. We are asking you to let us know your support of our annual operating budget for 2020. I'm not going to make a big deal of this. You have always been generous. You know the need, and I trust that you will respond according to you ability. I trust you ... and I trust God. That it my pitch. That is it ... that is my Stewardship sermon for this year.

However, in closing, I want to say something about Thanksgiving and gratitude. Years ago Caren was in a Walmart parking lot and saw a woman angrily spanking her child. Caren took a risk, and went up to the woman ... and offered her a hug. The woman broke down in Caren's arms.

Thanksgiving is a time to give thanks to God for the bounty that has been bestowed upon us ... materially, emotionally, spiritually. But words are not enough to convey our gratitude. A prayer of Thanksgiving to God as we begin a feast is not enough. Telling others at the Thanksgiving table what we are thankful for is not enough. We have to live gratitude to really express our thanks to the one who has given us life. Every act of kindness ... every word of encouragement ... every shared tear of comfort ... every handshake of welcome to the stranger ... they are all tangible signs of gratitude for the life that each of is given as a beloved child of God. So, remember that Thanksgiving Day is but the outward and visible sign of that inward and spiritual grace ... that gratitude that is expressed in actions small and great. And, each act of gratitude makes this world a better place ... one small gesture of gratitude at a time.

The Last Sunday of our Pentecost season ... Christ the King Sunday ... the thirteenth anniversary of a schism in this church ... the Sunday before Thanksgiving and Black Friday ... The Sunday of my annual Stewardship sermon. Jesus taught about the kingdom of God ... the way the world would be ... your world and my world ... if God were alive in everyone's heart the way God was alive in the heart of Jesus. Jesus did not ask to be worshipped. Rather, Jesus pointed to God. Instead of worshipping the Christ on a throne above all, I think Christ the King is about living as

if God were alive in each of us as God was alive in Jesus. This gives us the power to be vulnerable in our gratitude ... to risk the handshake of welcome ... to risk the tear of empathy ... to risk giving our encouragement in the face of despair ... to risk offering a hug in the midst of violence.

The turkeys are selling, the decorations are up, the lights have been lit, and we are moving into a culture of consumerism that wants to make the almighty dollar the king. The God alive in each of you as God was alive in Jesus wants a different allegiance ... one that leads to the fullness of life, not just immediate gratification. That Christ essence is alive in all of you. Listen to it and let it have the power to rule in your life. This is a healing community ... for you and for me. This is a community where gratitude is a way of life ... individually and as a congregation. For that I give thanks to God.

Amen.