

Being Perfect
Ephesians 1:15-23
November 26, 2017 – Christ the King Sunday

Friends, it's Christ the King Sunday. It's the Sunday before Advent. According to the Church Calendar, it's the end of the Christian Year. Advent starts a new year, as we await anew, the birth of a Savior. But this past year has been quite a year. The national and international scene has been filled with disaster. First there are the natural disasters: wild fires, and earthquakes, and hurricanes stacked one on top of another. Then there is the violence: wars, several mass shootings and other incidents of terror; and through it all, Washington seems to be in a state of disarray. Indeed this past year might seem like a pessimist's field day. But I'm not a pessimist. I'm not a pessimist because I believe in the grace of God and the glory of Jesus Christ.

It was a joy today to baptize Morgan. Before I baptized her, I asked her a series of questions. They were big questions for a nine year old, but I met with Morgan last week. We went over those questions, and I can assure you that she understands those questions as well as you or I do. I can summarize those baptismal vows, with just two questions: 1) Do you renounce wickedness, evil, injustice and oppression; and 2) do you put your whole trust in the grace of Christ. Friends, I'd like to remind you that, if you're a member of this church, you too have answered those questions in the affirmative. And it's because I have also taken those vows that I'm not a pessimist.

I believe in the grace, the love of God as exemplified in the life, the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. I believe the love of God is the greatest gift in the entire world; and I believe that love is stronger than all the evil, all the injustice, all the violence, all the bigotry, all the wickedness. I also believe that you and I, by virtue of our baptisms, are called to spread that love, spread it by our prayers, spread it by our words, and spread it by our actions. Hear that word "action" as well as "prayers." I believe we are called to act to stem the violence. Not only is my conscience calling for action; my bishop is also calling for action, and you'll be hearing more about that in the future.

There's another vow that I have taken and most of you have not; and that's a vow to "go on to Christian Perfection." Christian Perfection is a doctrine that is uniquely Methodist. John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement in England, now almost 300 years ago, looked at the Sermon on the Mount, and in particular Matthew 5:48 and read: "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect." And, in that, Wesley saw a call. Jesus calls us to perfection. Now, those who are not Methodist ask, "How can we be perfect, only Jesus was perfect?" Well, Wesley did say that he had not achieved Christian Perfection, and

he had never known anyone who had. I never took a vow to be perfect. But when I was ordained, my bishop asked, “Are you *going on* to Christian Perfection” If I had said “No,” I would not be ordained. No, I’m not perfect, but I’ve taken a vow to reach for perfection, to move on toward perfection, to always seek to follow the perfect Christ.

So what does that mean for you, for me, for all Methodist, for all baptized Christians? It means that Jesus is our model. It was 1897 when Charles Sheldon wrote *In His Steps*. Today it sometimes sounds rather trite to ask WWJD, “What Would Jesus Do?” but that’s the question that Sheldon asked. What would life be like if we made all our decisions based on that one question: “What would Jesus do?” It’s not a new question. It was in the early fifteenth century that Thomas À Kempis wrote *The Imitation of Christ*, and it was, at least in part, that work on which Wesley based his doctrine of Christian Perfection.

And so, this is Christ the King Sunday; and I ask each of you, “Is Christ the King of your life?” In the United States of America, we don’t have a secular king. In fact our constitution, which I spoke of giving thanks for last week, is based in large part on the idea that we will never have a secular king, a single ruler. And that being the case, many of us may have trouble relating to the concept of kingship. To that let me simply say, everything. . . everything we say, everything we do should center around the love of Christ; and those four letters, WWJD. “What Would Jesus Do” should rightly be the primary force in all our decision making.

Election day is over for this year, but senators and representatives are already campaigning for 2018. I’m forbidden by law from actually endorsing a candidate. I am not forbidden from speaking to issues, and that includes platform planks that a certain candidate might put forward or stand against. But, at this time, let me simply say that I would hope that every time you go to the polls to vote, you will ask yourself, “What Would Jesus Do?” Which issues would Jesus vote for? Which candidates will best further the Gospel of Jesus Christ?

But voting is only a small part of the story. Every day we make decisions: Who will we talk to; how will we spend our money; what work will we do; where will we go; what will we eat; how will we care for our body and our physical well-being; how will we care for our soul and our spiritual well-being; how will we care for our neighbors – the neighbors living next door and the neighbors living half way around the world?

If Christ is the King of our lives, we will answer each of those questions, we will make each of those decisions, by responding to that single question – What Would Jesus Do? Oh, and by the way, please note that, in that list of decisions that we need to make every day I included self-care. Yes, I believe that God loves each

and every one of us; and while God calls us to love our neighbors, God also calls us to love ourselves; and care for our physical and spiritual and emotional needs should be as much a concern as caring for the needs of others. (And as an aside, I will tell you that I am currently looking at programs to benefit both the physical and spiritual health of this congregation. Stay tuned for that.)

Indeed, this is Christ the King Sunday. It's the end of the Christian Year. There are a lot of bad things happening in the world. But you and I are called to make the world a better place. You and I are called to make the world a better place because we are called to make Christ the center of our lives. And, if Christ is the center of our lives, we will spread the Good News of God's Amazing Love. And if we spread the Good News, others will make Christ the center of their lives. And, when enough people make Christ the center of their lives, the good will conquer the evil; Jesus shall reign, and of his kingdom there shall be no end.

Let us pray. . .

Most Holy Lord,
Walk with us. Lead us.
Give us the strength, the courage and the insight
to make you the center of our lives.
Give us the courage to speak out for justice,
righteousness and peace,
so that the Good News of your Amazing Love
might truly conquer evil.
Amen.

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