

Proper 29 Christ the King Sunday November 21, 2021 Jesus' Kingdom
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Franciscan priest and spiritual writer Richard Rohr has a quote that is perfect for today: "If Jesus is Lord, then Caesar is not. If Jesus is Lord, then the economy and stock market are not. If Jesus is Lord, then my possessions, country, and job are not. If Jesus is Lord, then I am not."

Today most mainline denominations like the Episcopal Church and Roman Catholic Church observe Christ the King Sunday. It's a pretty recent addition to the church calendar, added in the mid 1920's as the Church's response to the spread of fascism and was the Church's reminder to the world that we look to a different type of leadership and community. I suspect it remains on our Church calendar because it is good to reflect at least once a year on what it means to acknowledge Jesus as our king and to be part of his kingdom.

Fr. Rohr's quote tells us when Jesus is our King things like the stock market, government, possessions, country, job, personal opinions and desires are not. That doesn't mean we don't have to deal with these things. What it means is they are not intended to be the center of our lives. While I like the quote a lot, it still focuses on the things of this world, what Jesus said in today's Gospel are *not* his kingdom.

They may not be what Jesus' says his kingdom is made of, but they are things we are all achingly familiar with. So much so that it might be difficult to imagine what Jesus invited Pilate to see in today's Gospel: a kingdom not from this world. Often this gets interpreted to be heaven or life after death, or another world. And it is another world, but I wonder if it doesn't have to be separate from the world we engage in every day. Maybe, it is the world Jesus envisions being redeemed by the love of God. It's the same world we all live in, with all the stuff we have to deal with, a world broken by the selfishness of sin and greed, and despite all the pain, a world still deeply loved by God. So much so, that God sent Jesus not to punish or hurt us or the world but to love us.

For too many people, such love is so contrary to the world they know, they can't imagine what it looks like when this love is present and active in the world. It is therefore our very good fortune this morning that we have the opportunity to be reminded what this love looks like because in just a minute or two, we will be baptizing Nora into the Family of Christ, another way of talking about Jesus' kingdom here in this world.

There is a prayer we will pray just after baptizing Nora that tells us what Jesus' kingdom is like. It is a prayer where we will ask God to give her the stuff of God's kingdom here on earth. We will ask God to give her an **inquiring and discerning heart** – that is a heart that is open to learning and loving God and her neighbor as herself. We will ask God to give her **courage to persevere** – to not give up when life gets hard, or when someone tries to convince her there is no hope. We will ask God to give her the **spirit to know and love God**, to recognize God's love in the gift of friendship, the love of family, or even recognizing the holy in something as common as a television show, movie, or book, for there is no place God isn't. And, my favorite, we will ask God to give her **joy and wonder in all God's works**. Too often we can miss the beauty that is around us, but when we pause to notice the intricate pattern of frost on a window, or the colors of the birds, inspiring words of a poem or notes of music, the kindness of a stranger, how delicious a meal cooked with love tastes, that is the stuff of joy, the connection to the love of God.

When I met Nora, I saw this joy and wonder and delight as she explored this church yard and gave special attention to the Groggu doll, and you don't have to know him from the TV show he was on to recognize him. His cuteness took over social media, and I thought it would be nice to bring him along when I do office hours on the porch when our church's coffee shop is open. I sit Groggu on a chair facing the sidewalk, put a mask on him, because we all have to do our part these days, and give him my cup of tea. Passersby often take a second look and smile at him, now some folks even look for him. I figure we all have been having such a strange and difficult two years, we could all use a little whimsy, a little something that doesn't ask much of us and makes us smile. Nora, of course, couldn't resist him. She picked him up, not phased by his unusual looks, gently slid his mask down, kissed him, and put his mask back as best she could. It was sweet.

And I saw in her openness an inquiring and discerning heart, a spirit that recognizes an opportunity to love, regardless of appearance, and so much joy and wonder. And perhaps that is what we all need more than anything, today and every day.

So, I want to thank Nora and her family and godparents, for showing us on Christ the King Sunday what Jesus' kingdom can be, when we live into it.