

Today is known as Christ the King Sunday, the last Sunday on the Christian calendar before we begin a new year with Advent next week. Today we celebrate Christ's ultimate position as our ruler and the ruler of all creation. Of course, we Americans are accustomed to selecting our leaders by means of an election, so I spent a little time this week pondering what an election campaign might look like if Jesus and Satan ran against each other for the office of King of Kings.

I imagine that a campaign ad for Satan might go something like this; "My opponent says that his yoke is easy and his burden is light, but when Jesus was asked his position on taxes, his response was that we should render unto Cesar what is Cesar's AND he is under federal investigation for violating the Sabbath laws. So a vote for Jesus is a vote for higher taxes and lawlessness. I'm Satan and I approve this message.

Not too far a stretch considering the campaign seasons we have recently experienced. Half-truths and slander used to make the point that you should vote for candidate A because at least he or she is not the subhuman criminal that candidate B is.

How has it come about that we tolerate behavior in our elected leaders that we would never allow in our homes, our schools or our work places? Perhaps it's because we allow desperate measures in the pursuit of power. "Power corrupts" the saying goes, "and absolute power corrupts absolutely."

So what do you think a campaign Ad for Jesus might look like? It may not be as abstract a question as you think because all of the gospels were written with the stated purpose of convincing people that Jesus is the Son of God. On one occasion Jesus did refer to Satan as the father of lies, but in fact Jesus spent most of his campaign time talking about who he is and what he came to do. "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that whoever believes in him will not perish but have everlasting life." "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, even if they die, will live forever." And from today's gospel: "My Kingdom is not from this world. If my Kingdom were of this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over...But my Kingdom is not from here."

I'm using this imaginary campaign between Satan and Jesus in the hope that it will illuminate the differences between the Kingdoms of this world and the Kingdom that Jesus spoke of. And I certainly don't intend to over generalize matters and imply that all our political leaders are bad in some way. Elected leaders, like all leaders, have the opportunity to do tremendous good (and many do) or tremendous harm (and some do), but watching a full American campaign season always alarms me because I see that even good people are drawn into the politics of slander and half-truths in the pursuit of power.

Then consider King Jesus, whose Kingdom is not of this world and whose citizens are to behave differently than this world. There are so many examples I could draw from in the gospels to tease out how different Jesus is and his followers should be, but the one I want to focus on comes from Matthew's gospel, when Jesus sent some disciples to get the donkey on which he would ride into Jerusalem as King during what we call his Triumphal Entry (Palm Sunday).

Matthew quoted the prophet Zechariah, who wrote "Look, your King is coming to you, meek and mounted on a donkey..." Jesus, the meek King. The language of meekness provides us with a very clear contrast with how authority is exercised in this world. It is a word that pops up quite often in the Bible. The meek shall inherit the earth. St. Paul lists meekness as one of the fruits of the Spirit. And yet, how often do we Christians talk about and encourage the inherent value of meekness as a royal virtue in God's Kingdom. We don't, of course, because in our culture it is associated with weakness, and so we leave it out of our teaching and preaching most of the time. And yet, it is apparent that when Christians leave meekness out of the story, then our Kingdom begins to look an awful lot like the Kingdoms of the world that we are trying not to emulate.

Meekness is not weakness. It is inner strength, drawn from Christ, that refuses to act or react beneath the dignity of our Christian calling. Turn the other cheek. Go the extra mile. Do unto others, as you would have them do unto you. It short, when wrong is done to you, do not respond in kind. Just look at how Jesus conducted himself before Pilate. That is meekness.

The principles that provide the groundwork for Christ's Kingdom are relatively simple, but very, very difficult to consistently apply. Grace does catch us when we fall, but as we consider Christ as our King let us see him as the meek King, who invites us into a very different Kingdom, with very different values the purpose of which is to transform all our campaigns from ones for the pursuit of power to one's in pursuit of grace, forgiveness, and love. Amen.