

## A Six Part Sermon in F Major

This is a 6-part sermon.<sup>1</sup>

I borrowed this idea from a sermon Whit sent me  
that Nadia Boltz-Webber did.



And she's Lutheran pastor  
and I'm Presbyterian one.  
She's got tattoos and I do not.  
She has short, straight, gray hair  
and I have longish, curly, mousey-brown hair.  
So what I'm saying is,  
we're basically the same person.



**Part 1. It's hard to not launch into Advent because we already have our Christmas tree up.**

Um, surely you have all noticed  
that Christmas has overtaken  
the entire season of fall.  
I found out why the Christmas parade,  
here in Hickory, is so early in November.  
Mandy Pitts Hildebrand says  
they can't get all the floats any other weekend.  
Used to be the parade  
was the second weekend in December

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/nadiabolzweber/2015/12/fall-on-your-knees-a-sermon-for-christ-the-king-sunday/>

but since Hobby Lobby opened,  
that seemed too late,  
and the floats all got booked up  
around the weekend beforehand  
and Thanksgiving weekend wasn't an option.  
So, the Friday before Thanksgiving it is.

We Davises went and I yelled,  
'Merry Christmas' at everyone  
and was louder than many of the floats  
we were there to watch.

Which also meant  
when Tripp went to the grocery store  
last weekend *before* Thanksgiving,  
the girls and I sneaked some Christmas music  
onto the Pandora station.

And when my mom and Rob  
came over for dinner and heard Burl Ives  
crooning from the stereo, my mom asked  
*what happened to Christmas after Thanksgiving?*  
I just looked at her and said, *shhh, this is my favorite.*  
It wasn't my favorite Christmas song though,  
it was just a singing snowman.

My favorite Christmas carol  
is O Little Town of Bethlehem,  
but we'll get to that later.

But now that we've had the feast to end all feasts  
—the time when Wisconsin trades its cheese head hat  
and instead dons waterproof waiters  
to become the highest producer  
of cranberries in the US  
(because sermons should be educational too);

now that we're done with pilgrims, Plymouth, pumpkins,  
potatoes, pies, and maybe parents,  
culturally we've moved on to Christmas.

The television commercials have started;  
the Hallmark channel is loaded up  
to show at least four holiday movies a day  
until Christmas;  
the music on normal radio has made the switch  
—satellite radio made the switch after Halloween—  
houses have added the twinkling little lights;  
I'm allowed to quote Christmas Vacation;  
so, bring on the Hershey Kisses  
that play Deck the Halls.

Yet here, in the church,  
we are on something like  
the New Year's Eve of the new church year;  
the final day in our church calendar,  
which means it is not yet Advent or Christmas.  
We don't have our Kairos tree up  
or any decorations and we aren't lighting  
any Advent candles.  
We are stuck in the figgy pudding  
of Christ the King Sunday.



## **Part 2. Why I think Christ the King Sunday would be better in the Spring-time.**

I didn't know this until recently,  
but Christ the King Sunday  
wasn't a liturgical Sunday until the 1920's.  
Which as far as liturgical seasons go,  
it is the embryo of the liturgical life cycle.  
It is so young;  
not like Lent or Advent  
who are well along  
in thousand-year traditions.

Pope Pius XI instituted Christ the King Sunday  
because of the growing concern over secularism.<sup>2</sup>

“In the fallout of World War One  
and amidst the Kaisers and Kings and Czars,  
it felt to the church that it was time  
to reassert that Czar Ferdinand or Kaiser Wilhelm  
isn't king, *Christ* is king.”<sup>3</sup>

This is all well and good,  
and I sorta get the reasoning behind it,  
but what I don't get is the timing.  
Doesn't celebrating the kingship of our Lord  
work better like right after Easter?

Really I've given this some thought  
—maybe between Easter and Pentecost?  
Maybe we should celebrate  
the ascension of the risen Christ  
and then because he,  
“ascended into heaven and sitteth at the right hand of God”  
we could have like an installation/coronation Sunday.

I think Disney already has a song penned for that day  
—any Frozen fans out there?  
Celebrating Christ as King,  
just seems to flow better in the middle of the year  
instead of the very end of the church year.

Springtime seems like a better spot  
for Christ the King Sunday.



### Part 3. Why, Again, I feel it should be Advent

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<sup>2</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Feast\\_of\\_Christ\\_the\\_King](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Feast_of_Christ_the_King)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/nadiabolzweber/2015/12/fall-on-your-knees-a-sermon-for-christ-the-king-sunday/>

But like most things,  
no one is asking my opinion  
on where to put the holidays.  
Celebrating Christ the King  
right before we spend a month  
awaiting Jesus' birth seems so odd.  
Christ the King Sunday feels like a bump  
in the proverbial road to Advent.  
And just for review  
this is the cycle for the church calendar  
—because sermons should be  
educational from time to time.

We begin the church year with Advent,  
waiting for Christ to be born,  
then it is Christmas.  
Then it is Epiphany,  
when the wise men come  
and give him gifts you would give a king...(see?)

he does amazing things in his life, so Lent;  
he's crucified, died and buried.  
Easter!  
Another celebration in the church year  
But then he's risen, he's ascends,  
and we don't celebrate again  
until the Spirit descends, Pentecost.

We go through a whole mess  
of what we call ordinary time  
and really that means let's do a sermon series,  
because the church calendar has nothing to celebrate  
and somehow, we loop back around  
to kingship right before we start all over again.

All the images I kept looking up  
under the theme of Christ, the King,  
have Jesus wearing a crown of thorns  
and carrying a cross.

Those are images we use in Springtime. **See part 2.**

Plus, there is the whole king thing nowadays anyway.

What do we care about a king  
unless he's marrying a duchess  
in a sweater and knickers?



“*King*” seems as antiquated  
as the British royalty tradition  
that boys wear shorts until age 8.  
Because sermons might help one day in trivia.  
The problem is that there isn't a good  
modern-day equivalent to *king*.  
We can't celebrate Christ the President Sunday.  
Or Christ the CEO Sunday.  
Or Christ the Pope Sunday.



Kingship as Jesus embodies it,  
is apparently different from all those things  
—his reply to Pilate tells us as much,

“My kingdom is not of this world.  
If my kingdom were from this world,  
my followers would be fighting  
to keep me from being handed over to the Jews.  
But as it is, my kingdom is not from here.”

This statement read by itself  
doesn't really make any sense,  
just like the weather here in the south.  
It is cold one day and warm the next.  
We drove through Boone  
to get our Christmas tree and I kid you not  
—it was snowing in a one-mile region on 105  
and no where else.

Makes no sense.

*Jesus, are you a king or not,*  
Pilate wants to know—  
Jesus is like that African American woman's character in the Matrix  
who only answers a question with a question.  
Which brings us to part 4.



#### **Part 4. Reading this scripture from the gospel of John can be confusing. Context matters.**

John has always been the redhead of gospels.  
Or if you want to use my family,  
the blonde-haired Huntley of the Davises.  
John's good news about Jesus  
starts off poetically but at the same time enigmatic,  
*'In the beginning was the word...'*

John has no Christmas story,  
different miracles than the other 3 gospels  
and different sayings of Jesus too.  
There is no sermon on the mount,  
but there is a really long sermon by Jesus  
—see chapters 13, 14, 15, 16, and 17.  
By the time we get to chapter 18 in John's gospel,  
which the NRSV subtitles,  
*The Betrayal and arrest of Jesus—*

I'd be ready to betray my own child  
for a bathroom break after a sermon like that.

Our scripture for Christ the King  
jumps right into the heat of the moment;  
Pilate lounging in his quarters eating grapes  
and asking Jesus if he is the king.  
Okay, I made up the lounging  
and the grapes part.  
Out of context of course you wonder  
what exactly is going on.

But this is where we land;  
in the midst of a Good Friday reading  
we happen in on Jesus in the midst of a public,  
though at the same time private conversation  
with Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea  
and our king Jesus, a rabble-rousing Jew  
from the backwater town of Nazareth.  
They go back and forth  
and back and forth about whether or not  
Jesus is a king  
and whose king he might be.

What we do know about the context  
of this John passage is  
that because it is called the betrayal and arrest  
—those are the things that we know  
happen before Jesus gets tried before Pilate.  
Jesus wraps up his long sermon, speech, whatever  
at the end of chapter 17 with a prayer.

And in chap 18 he and the disciples  
travel out to the valley  
(see John is weird and doesn't say garden)  
but he is with his friends when he arrested.

Betrayed by one of his inner circle.  
Arrested by the temple thugs  
with no real clear reason



for a charge except blasphemy.  
Humiliated before the highest religious authority,  
of his own religious tradition mind you—  
denied again by his closest and best friend 3 different times.  
Slapped on the face for speaking truth  
and marched in the dark of night  
to face Pilate.

In the context of who Jesus is,  
he is someone who has no power or authority.  
The temple's Committee on Ministry  
hadn't met with him yet,  
his faith statement hasn't been approved;  
he hasn't yet been ordained.

Which means he has no "right"  
to be preaching and healing people.  
And so the people who do have the "right"  
to do those things want Jesus to stop.

But he doesn't.  
He just keeps on proclaiming  
that the kingdom of God is at hand.  
So Pilate tells Jesus, listen, they are accusing you  
of being King of the Jews.  
Are you King of the Jews?

Currently, Caesar is king.  
If Jesus answers Caesar is king,  
the Jews will riot and lose all hope.  
If he says no, actually I'm the king,  
he's signed his own death warrant.

Context as they say, is important.



## **Part 5. I'd like a better king, please**

By this measure Jesus is a lousy king.  
His answers to Pilate sound evading at best.  
When he's arrested,  
Judas brings some soldiers  
and some police under the authority  
of the chief priests and Pharisees  
who come with lanterns, torches and weapons.

Do they expect him to fight?  
Do they bring the water hoses  
in case his followers start a protest?

Jesus goes with them willingly.  
He takes the verbal abuse  
and shame and shade  
from the Jewish faith leaders.  
He takes the slaps on the face,  
the mockery,  
the outright hypocrisy of their place and position  
as religious leaders for the people  
—the people he is here to free and heal...

Then Jesus, the King of the Jews,  
is crucified and he dies  
a horribly, gruesome, criminal's death.  
He conquers death,  
rises from the grave and shares dinner  
with a couple guys who can't see truth  
until it breaks bread right in front of their faces.

Jesus doesn't ride back into town  
to show Pilate his wounds and say, '*see, I told ya*'.  
He doesn't go back to the temple  
to scare Caiaphas and Ananias  
with cheap curtain tricks.

Instead, he encourages the friends that are left  
with the mission of spreading the good word  
that in him, death is defeated  
and God's love triumphs over all.

He promises to send the Holy Spirit to be a help  
—and yet.

And yet.  
Cancer still exists.

And yet,  
people are still starving.

And yet...  
I'm sorry Jesus,  
but the world still needs saving.  
I'd like a better king I think.

Because, I see racism and sexism  
are among obvious problems.

Because I see the ever-increasing  
warming of our planet as a threat to all life,  
really is no longer debatable.

I see the prevalence of guns  
in the hands of many who are unstable and unfit,  
and they continue to kill in our children in schools,  
our brothers and sisters in churches  
and our neighbors in public spaces.

I see a huge gap between the haves and have-nots.

I see that the cycle of violence didn't end with the cross.

"Your own people have handed you over.  
What have you done?"  
Pilate asks Jesus.



**Part 6. King vs. Reign. Also my favorite Christmas Carol in F Major.**

“You say that I am a king.  
For this I was born,  
and for this I came into the world,  
to testify to the truth.”

I said there wasn't a modern equivalent for king.  
I still think I am right.  
But instead of Christ the King Sunday,  
we could call it Reign of Christ Sunday  
and that I think that both changes things  
and keeps them the same.  
The Reign of Christ still has similar undertones  
to Christ the King:  
the power,  
the authority,  
the lordship, right?  
Yet *reign* seems to have  
a more blanketing feel  
rather than a siloed power-model of king.

When you think about a king's reign,  
it makes you think about the things  
the king did in his lifetime:  
his accomplishments,  
what he was able to do with his power while he lived;  
the legacy a king leaves and imparts  
to his subjects, followers, the people.

A king's reign may have included  
warfare or peace.  
A king's reign might have meant  
a better economic uptick  
or it may mean that things were so destitute  
the poor stole moldy bread from the bakery.

The reign of a king all boils down to:  
***what did that king  
do with all the power he had?  
In what ways***

*did the king establish  
his kingdom so that it would last?*

Let me tell you why O Little Town of Bethlehem  
is my favorite Christmas carol,  
but in F Major.

*(Carol Anne sings)*

The reason I like it in F Major,  
in the tune of Forest Green,  
is because I hear the song differently.  
I hear the words differently.  
Singing it the same way year after year  
meant I didn't really hear it.  
But in a different tune,  
the words sank deeper down;  
much like a Good Friday reading  
maybe hearing this passage year after year  
only in the springtime,  
meant I didn't really hear it either.

*Cast out all sin and enter in,  
be born in us today.  
That is the reign of Christ.  
My kingdom is not of this world.*

Now, I hear you Jesus.

My reign will not come with lanterns, torches and weapons.

My reign will come with witnessing to the truth  
—that in my lifetime, Jesus says,  
during my reign  
the blind were given eyes to see  
and lame were given strong legs to walk.

My accomplishments are that one time

I went to a tax collector's house to eat  
and his heart was transformed  
and he turned his life around  
and made his community a better place.

During my reign of power, Jesus says,  
every time I was met with violence  
I offered justice and love  
—which at times,  
are the same thing.

My legacy is that I loved children,  
just because they were children.

My accomplishment is that when I was in a room full of people,  
I scanned the crowd for the slow, the forgotten,  
the miserable, the losers,  
the differently abled,  
the poor, the minority  
—and I look them in the eye  
and reminded them they were more beautiful  
than all the lilies in the field.

The reign of Christ is what is ushered in,  
to take over our lives and transform them  
from the inside, out.

I can stop thinking Jesus is a lousy king  
by the world's standards.  
Or maybe I accept *that of course*  
by the world's standard,  
he is a lousy king.

He never set out to be  
a king according to this world.

King Jesus isn't out to champion my liberal cause

or my conservative one;  
    he is telling my heart  
that he is the way, the truth and the life.

Even though I want a king  
    who is ready to beat down the door of injustice,  
        Jesus is too busy holding the hand  
            of a single mother living in Hickory Housing  
                as she keeps it together  
                    to work all day  
                    and help her kids with homework at night.

I can stop looking for king Jesus  
    to ruin the big companies  
        spewing pollutants into the environment  
            because he's busy with the engineers  
                who are coming up with ways to use wind  
                    and solar power and recycle the trash  
                    to keep the planet its pretty blue and green.

I can stop looking for king Jesus  
    to wipe out all the terrorists, racists and bigots  
        because he already has his head down,  
            chiseling at those hearts of stone.

I can stop looking for king Jesus  
    to put an end to all the bad things  
        I see in the world  
            because Jesus says  
            I want the wheat and the weeds  
                to grow together  
                    because my kingdom needs them both.

I guess what I hear in F Major is,  
    *No ear may hear his coming,*  
        *but in this world of sin,*  
            *where meek souls will receive him still,*  
                *the dear Christ enters in.*

So even though it is close to Advent and Christmas  
I realize I do need to celebrate  
the reign of Christ the King.

The king unlike other kings.

The king who knows how brutal life can be,  
but whose legacy declares  
that this life is worth saving.

*O come to us, abide in us,  
Our Lord Emmanuel.*

This is the reign we need.  
This is the king we celebrate.

*The hopes and fears of all the years  
are met in **him** tonight.*