So today is the Sunday before Thanksgiving. President Lincoln, during the darkest days of the Civil War bade all Americans give thanks to God for life, liberty and all good things. It’s the nature of Gratitude, that even in the worst of times, we can choose to be thankful. And, even in the best of times, we can forget to be thankful. So let’s be thankful, no matter how dark we think these times may be.

Now, today is also called Christ the King Sunday of the Christian Calendar. This Calendar is weird because it starts next week with First Advent. Then comes Christmas, Epiphany, and Ash Wednesday, Lent, Easter and Pentecost, along with other smaller festivals. Those are old, very old festivals. Christ the King is only ninety years old – the pope decreed in 1925 that this last Sunday be Christ the King. 1 9 2 5

Now, you may have heard it said, in the secular, godless America of 2015 that the world is all a-going to hell in a handbasket? Perhaps you’ve seen the breathless media coverage? That the craziness and the violence and the hatred and ugliness in the world is just going to take over? Whether its terrorists abroad, or extremists here at home, everyone’s angry, everyone’s shouting, the government won’t do anything, and all the good people are gone? One of my favorite poets William Butler Yeats:

*Turning and turning in the widening gyre*

*The falcon cannot hear the falconer;*

*Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;*

*Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,*

*The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere*

*The ceremony of innocence is drowned;*

*The best lack all conviction, while the worst*

*Are full of passionate intensity.*

*Surely some revelation is at hand;*

*Surely the Second Coming is at hand!*

That sounds just like America 2015, like the Middle East, like the world! Yeats wrote that poem in 1919, right after the First World War, in Ireland, where republican forces were finally, after decades of bloody failure, finally winning independence from the British Empire. Empires were crumbling all over. The Pope in Rome looked at Europe and saw dictators seizing power amidst the ruins of fallen empires – the Roaring Twenties might have been good times here in America, but the Hard Times were coming. In the aftermath of the Great War, the Hard Times had arrived! The hope and livelihood of millions of Europeans were laid waste. Rulers emerged who hated the old regimes, with their corrupt state churches, so they persecuted Christians, adding to the misery and conflict. Farther east the Ottomans had ruled for centuries (in relative peace, for Muslims, for Christians, and for Jews: Don’t you EVER believe that old lie I’ve heard so many times, that “Those people over there have been killing each other for centuries!” Under the Ottoman Turks, there was peace throughout the Middle East for over four hundred years! But their empire fell in the Great War, and the British came and made a complete mess of things by carving the region up into the unhappy and completely artificial states we now recognize – Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia. What a mess!

So the Pope decreed this day to remind all rulers, duly elected or tyrants, that Christ is King, and Christians were His Citizens, and any violence, any terrorism, used against them was against God, who would vindicate his people in time. The Pope also wanted to remind all Christians that world leaders are also subject to Christ, and every dictator, every tyrant, every despot would answer to God.

Lutherans, among others, agreed with the Pope’s decree and adopted the festival of Christ the King later. Years passed. The tyrants did not win out, though the struggle to defeat them was long and painful. And no sooner did the Second World War conclude than the Cold War emerged, and half of Europe was occupied by the Soviet Union, but that empire fell in time as well. Empires Fall. And rise, and fall again. Just as in the days of the Prophet Isaiah, in the city of Jerusalem.

Consider the Prophet Isaiah sang his songs in the last days of the northern Kingdom of Israel. Isaiah lived in Jerusalem, capital of Judah, but Samaria and Israel were still kin, and Israel was threatened by a violent enemy, the Assyrian Empire. You think this Daesh group is bad – I refuse to use the word, “ISIS” because, as I understand it, these terrorists consider it an insult to refer to them as ‘Daesh’. Further the words Islamic State are lies because it’s not a state if all you do is kill people, and further, it’s not Islam if all you do is kill people. I don’t care how many times you scream “Allah Akbar!” Blowing people up is NOT Islam any more than putting a white hood on your head and burning a cross is Christian. So: Daesh it is!

Now, where was I? Oh, yeah Assyria. If you think Daesh is scary, imagine millions of them. With tanks, guns, rockets, and worst of all, plans for you. Assyria was the cruelest, biggest, meanest empire to emerge from the Fertile Crescent, and they were on the march. Now, God has something to say about Assyria. God has something to say about all our enemies, but today God is speaking to us, God’s beloved, God’s vineyard. God’s not upset with Assyria at this moment. I promise you God is Very upset with this Daesh crowd, but right now, it’s all about us. And why?

Verse Seven: *For the vineyard of the Lord of Hosts is the house of Israel, and the people of Judah are his pleasant planting. He expected justice, but saw bloodshed. Righteousness, but heard a cry! Oh, you who join house to house, who add field to field, until there is room for no one by you, and you are left to live alone in the midst of the land!*

There’s MORE we have in common with our ancient forbears in Judah and Israel. God is very interested in how we treat each other, and God gets angry when the rich get richer, and the poor get poorer.

Now, before you start thinking I’m a socialist or worse, a liberal, think about this: It doesn’t matter if you’re a capitalist, a socialist, live in a democracy, or a dictatorship, whether you have a president or a king: The rich get richer, and the poor get poorer – that’s just the way it is – if left untended, that’s how things settle out. But God CLEARLY is angry that nobody did anything to STOP it! The King could stop it, with laws to protect small farmers, small business, small people – the priests could stop it, by citing the Torah, where God’s law protects the small against the great. They could clamor for justice and fairness until the king helped create and sustain equity among people. And that’s what God expected, but that’s not what happened. So God’s prophet sings his song, and Assyria approaches to level everyone’s income!

Now, here we are today, concerned about many things. We’re worried about terrorists. We’re worried about refugees. We’re worried about all kinds of things even though God is in charge. Christ is king, people! If you’ve taken the time and energy to get dressed on Sunday morning to come here when you could be doing a lot of things more practical, then I’m going to assume you have some faith in God. I’m saying you should have more. Bring your fears, your doubts, your worries and concerns, bring them and leave them at this altar, because God wants you to live courageously and generously. God expects this. It is written in the bible! Have faith!

If God has gone to all the trouble of loving the world, of sending his Son Jesus, going through all the messy details of living amongst us, dying on the cross, rising again in glory, then let’s imagine God can handle our crises today, okay?

If you watch news television and it scares you, I want you to stop. If you listen to news casters telling you what to fear, and then who to blame, I want you to stop. Just stop it. Terrorists do what they do to create, well, terror. So if the news you watch makes you more afraid, then guess what? That’s just more terror. If the news you watch doesn’t tell you anything about the world, of course, that’s pointless, so don’t watch that either. But be careful. The powers in this world want you frightened, because frightened people can be manipulated. The powers in this world, be they terrorists or those who work to make the rich richer and the poor poorer, want you angry and scared, ready to do what you would never ordinarily do!

Christ the King, on the other hand, wants you brave, and generous, and kind. Christ the king expects justice, mercy, righteousness, faith, hope, and love. These are the real fruit of the vine, the beautiful bounty that God rejoices in. These fruit spread – they send out shoot of kindness and grace and peace, and they spread. Maybe not with explosions, maybe not with 24/7 news coverage, not with pundits shouting about their urgent danger, but they grow. Faith, hope and love, these change the world for the better, to a world where everyone can live in peace and justice.

For now we declare that Christ is King, even though it seems fear, despair, hate and terror rule the world. For now, we contradict the news channels, we contradict the media that shouts of war, terror, government inaction! Anger, blame, hate!

We contradict all that and we proclaim the reign of Christ, the Kingdom of God. We raise up faith, hope and love, with courage, with patience, with resolve. We are the citizens of the kingdom of God, and we will NOT be shaken. We will NOT be manipulated. We are God’s people, and Christ our Lord is King.

*Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’*