

We modern Americans love to be entertained. We love the new and the fresh and the innovative, and although there is a place for this in life – “sing unto the Lord a new song” – this mindset engenders a certain restlessness and impatience. Constantly being connected to all the idiocy of the internet doesn’t help either. We are bored easily. We dislike repetition. We prefer action to stillness, hubbub to quietness. We like things that our brains absorb without effort instead of books that demand our attention and challenge our presuppositions. We are consumers indoctrinated in the mantra that the customer is always right. Yet the Bible asserts bluntly that each of us, individually, is flawed and alienated from the Creator.

So I begin this morning by noting how grateful I am for the lectionary. The lectionary makes us repeat, year after year, the same readings. It does not present novelty to keep us entertained, but rather knows that we humans need to be confronted over and over with the eternal truths which God has revealed to us in His Word. The lectionary forces upon us all of those things that don’t naturally resonate with us, particularly us as human beings in modern America. In traditional Anglican catholicism, we are called to submit to the tradition that has been passed down to us, for the ancient wisdom, the ancient truths, are healthful for us. We need to be shaped by the Bible; we need to submit to the Bible; we need to hear it over and over and over again throughout our lives. And not just hear it again, but to live it again, to enact it ritually, repetitively. This is why we process on Palm Sunday and Rogation days – we are embodying in our actions what we read, what we hear, and what we profess. In the lectionary, the liturgy, and the tradition, we are being formed in godliness.

Though I haven’t looked up the statistics, I believe a slight majority of Americans still profess to be Christians. Look around and you will see churches everywhere. Yet Christians in this country seem not to be having an effective impact on culture. Why? I suggest that this is because the flavor of Christianity which dominates American culture is *consumerist*. The underlying message of consumerism is that “the individual is god,” so we come to expect that God should accommodate the individual; that like any product, it is God’s role to make us happy. Is this blatantly preached? Sometimes, when you hear “if you are faithful to God, then He will make you rich, healthy, and happy.” But more commonly this message isn’t expressed in sermons or teaching; it is simply assumed without our being aware of it.

Have you ever heard the following? “Your church is fine, but I just don’t see what you get out of that.” Or, “I like attending such and such a church because they have a great worship band.” Or, “I am so moved by the preaching.” These statements seem innocent enough, but they subtly reveal a consumerist mindset. Who is the subject in each of these sentences? “I.” The “I” will shop around to find the most accommodating church, the one that provides the services that meet my needs. Oooh ... they make a great espresso! I’m going there. And to be sure, I don’t mean this as a blanket impugment of the motives of all other churches. It is great to provide help for the real needs that people have. But somewhere in the American Church, we have lost the plot.

Comparing the more consciously seeker sensitive churches to our parish, it is clear that our worship here is not “user friendly.” It is old. It is connected to the past. The forms we use harken back to the primitive church. Many of our collects originated with Gregory the Great, Bishop of Rome in the late 500s. For visitors and those who are new to our parish, there is a period of acculturation, a learning curve. Worshiping here requires something of the individual. It requires us to acknowledge that maybe we don’t know everything, maybe we could stand to put our preferences for entertainment aside and submit to an ancient and beautiful and formative tradition for our soul’s health. Worshiping here requires a desire to learn and to be formed deeply over time. Worshiping at Christ the King Anglican Church requires humility.

But this is the main point for us this morning, for we always need to follow Christ into deeper humility. “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.” For us this morning, we professing followers of Christ, baptized into His Body, the Church, this is not merely an interesting tidbit of knowledge – that Christ is the most humble of all, for in His very deeds He certainly is. Rather it is an imperative, “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.

What does humility look like? It does not mean that we are constantly down on ourselves, that we must believe that we have no worth and therefore can do nothing right, or that we should be gloomy to be humble. Jesus never is down on Himself in the gospels. He is open to what God would have Him do and He obeys with gladness, even when the task to which He is called is difficult, especially when the task to which He is called is difficult. Humility means that we rightly acknowledge who is God and who isn’t. Guess what? Just to give a hint here, none of us is God. And since we are not He, then we have work to do – the work of learning what we should do, and then the work of doing it. Central to this is that we listen closely to God through His Word, read and proclaimed. Leaning God’s Word is our lifelong endeavor for in doing so, we learn Jesus.

It also means being discerning about the authorities that we acknowledge in our lives. I find a lot of the difference between people on the social/political/religious right and the social/political/religious left, is comprised of the authorities in a person’s life. To whom do you listen for information on issues, both religious and secular? Beginning with the Enlightenment, the ultimate judge of information moved from the societal authorities to the individual. In many ways, this is very good, but it puts the burden upon the individual to be educated into discernment. This was the role of the traditional liberal arts – to provide the individual with the necessary tools to live well as a free person. Modern education has failed in this manner. Modern education teaches us servitude. It teaches us to be good labor. So instead

of being educated with a true understanding of how Creation is structured, and how we are to glorify God throughout our lives, it seems that we are ruled by whatever podcaster catches our imagination, not by the Word of God, and not by the ancient wisdom of the Church.

My goal here at Christ the King is that my ministry to you all would be characterized by the proper humility of our Lord Jesus. This means that I would obey my authorities, both the Word of God, and subordinately our bishops who are to guard the apostolic tradition, the ancient interpretation, which has been handed down to them and to us. There is room for new thought in the Church, for the development of the meaning of doctrine; but innovation that does violence to the ancient core of Christian belief and practice must be rejected out of hand. I need your prayers so that I would walk in those ancient well-worn paths that lead to a fuller, a richer, life in Christ, and that I would be humble in my life and ministry. One day, I must give an account of all my actions and teaching to Jesus Christ, who is the judge us all. Pray that I would indeed be found a worthy minister of the gospel.

I'm pleased to say that our bishops are indeed of the best quality and integrity. Allison and I had the privilege of being at the consecration of our newest suffragan bishop, the Rt. Rev. Dr. Charles Camlin, this past Thursday, and I am so grateful for the men who lead our diocese. They exemplify the humility of Christ, not with false self-disparagement, but by living into the gifts with which God has blessed them and placing those gifts in the service of the church. This summer these men along with the entire college of bishops of the Anglican Church in North America will be electing our next Archbishop to replace Archbishop Foley Beach. Be in diligent prayer that God would grant us another godly bishop to hold fast God's Word and guard the faith once for all delivered unto the Church.

So have you placed your gifts in service of the Church? How are you answering the call of God to mission? Not necessarily overseas mission, but the mission that we find right outside that door over there. As I read the Bible, I do not find participation here to be optional. Humility is not just a disposition of the soul; it is a manifestation of obedience to the call of Christ. Humility takes instruction; humility obeys even at a cost to the self. Holy week is upon us, and the example of Christ's humble obedience ever before us. Can we with any integrity confess to God that we have, in actual deeds, taken on the mind of Christ, following His example in even a minimal way? Contemplate upon this in the upcoming week, and then change as needed. Find a way to minister to your family here at Christ the King. Find a way to minister to those outside of this parish. This is the season of Resurrection. Let the old ways that are not submitted to Jesus Christ pass away. Take on the mind of Christ through obedience to the call of Christ. And then be resurrected into an active faith. Faith without works is dead. May your faith be characterized by the Resurrected life of Christ.

Finally brothers and sisters, let us not forget the glory that Christ won through His humility, the glory that is to be had through life in Christ. Having stated that Jesus Christ obeyed the Father even to the point of death, the epistle lesson then concludes:

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Palm Sunday

K. Bartel, 4

Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, AMEN.