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St. Anne's Episcopal Church, Warsaw
Last Sunday after Pentecost: Christ the King (Proper 29)
November 21, 2021

Lectionary Year B: John 18:33-37

One of the things that always seems to get my attention (which is precisely the intent) on my travels via automobile is the enduring presence of tourist traps. Tourist traps usually have a "hook," like some sort of attraction to lure in curious travelers, and they benefit from a remote location, because if you've been on the road for hours and hours and if the scenery (if you can call it that) has been monotonous, you're ready for a break, anyway. Two tourist traps that spring to mind for me are South Dakota's Wall Drug, and Michigan's Mystery Spot on the Upper Peninsula shortly before you cross the big bridge. I've been to Wall Drug but not the Mystery Spot. The former (Wall Drug) apparently got its start as a place to refresh oneself -- and perhaps one's horse -- with some cold, fresh water, and, the last time I was there, one could still treat oneself to roughly a thimbleful of cold, fresh water for no charge.

The money was made, of course, on the trinkets and "souvenirs" that they sold, because, hey, once you got there, you had to have at least something to commemorate your visit!

Any salesman with an opportunistic streak would be the perfect tourist trap proprietor. And, in reality, the only purpose of a tourist trap is to make money for the proprietor, as the amount of

historical or educational value in a tourist trap is virtually zero. My hunch is that, as technology progresses, the curiosities that tourist traps promise to offer can be seen virtually anywhere thanks to the Internet, so they will be extinct within my lifetime, if not sooner.

Mark my words!

The loss to our collective pop culture, however, will be immense when the last tourist trap closes. Maybe a few will survive, like the last remaining drive-in movie theaters...

The enduring elements of the tourist trap remain pretty simple, though: Have the "hook," and don't spill the beans about what's inside, because then no one would bother stopping. As an example, one can still find -- several hours away from Wall, South Dakota -- simple roadside advertisements that read "Have you dug Wall Drug?"...and nothing else.

But the "hook" is, in my opinion, so filled with gimmicks and crass commercialism. Speaking personally, I don't think I could ever run a business where nothing of value or meaning was offered, which is why I'm doing what I'm doing now instead of selling snake oil! This, I believe, can be attributed to the example of Christ himself.

You see, the image of a "hook" doesn't apply to Christ; he's not in the business for himself and he doesn't have to resort to side-

show antics to lure people in. Instead, he offers the real substance of humanity's deepest needs like life, hope, and salvation. These are not "hooks" to give us a fix; rather, these are gifts to sustain us unto eternal life. On this Sunday of Christ the King, the image of a crown would logically supplant that of a hook. Christ reveals his mercy in a crown of thorns that he takes on freely, for us and for our salvation.

Our Gospel text gives us a glimpse of some of the confusion as to what Christ's kingship meant. This crown of thorns was not what it should've been -- anyone who offers himself to be executed is no triumphant king! But Jesus says, "My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews" (John 18:36a). Much of what made Christ's crucifixion so scandalous was the simple fact that it didn't make any sense. How was a king supposed to save his people by dying? Shouldn't he be annihilating his opponents instead?

Jesus answers these questions, albeit obliquely; he says, "But as it is, my kingdom is not from here" (John 18:36b). So, what does this mean? It means that Christ's kingdom probably isn't going to look like Disneyworld (yes, I've been to the Magic Kingdom, too). It's not going to be what most mortals would expect. In fact, it might look a little more like a soup kitchen or homeless shelter, except everyone will be properly fed, clothed, and housed. They will be fed with the Bread of Life, clothed with Christ's righteousness, and dwelling in the Lord's house forever. The aches,

pains, wounds, and tears of this world will be no more, and the crown of thorns will be a crown of glory.

But this is not a short-term fix that Jesus can "hook" us into; rather, this is an enduring promise that requires long-term commitment...and cannot guarantee immediate results. But what awaits us is well worth it in the end. Only by means of Christ's sacrifice, though, can we inherit the promise. To bypass that would be to strip Christ of his purpose here on earth, for he was -- and is -- to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins and end the repeated sacrifices for sins that had no long-term effect. As such, we say that Christ is a priest insofar as -- like the priests of old -- he offers the sacrifice, but not as an animal on the altar, but instead as himself on the cross.

Today, in addition to his priesthood, we consider Christ's kingship, which is borne out of self-offering instead of self-interest and out of lifting up others instead of lifting up himself. Chances are, if you consider yourself to be lucky to be alive today, it's probably because someone gave something of himself or herself to you. This person went the extra mile for you. Something similar happens in Christ, albeit on a higher level -- Christ gave his life so we might have eternal life, and, unlike the self-serving kings of old, this King seeks only to serve his people and his heavenly Father. While we cannot duplicate this level of self-offering (nor should we try), we can at least emulate it, particularly as we give a bit of what God has given us back to God.

People come to church looking for Christ, not only as King but also in the people around them. That means the church, ideally, is made up of people who emulate Christ's example, not with a hook to lure an unsuspecting visitor in with a gimmick, but with a self-offering that was the hallmark of Christ himself. As we conclude our stewardship emphasis here in the Fall of 2021, I would like us to hear a perspective from one of our newer faces at St. Anne's, Chuck Brindle. I know that St. Anne's has offered something to him, which is why he offers of himself to St. Anne's.

I therefore cede the lectern to him.

Thanks be to God!