

A SERMON PREACHED ON SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 25, 2018,

AT BETHANY BEACH CHRISTIAN CHURCH, BETHANY BEACH, DE

It's the week after the Thanksgiving holiday and amazingly enough we're on our way to Christmas! We had no special interruptions at our meal this year for a change, though we have had some in the past. I can recall one holiday when my father, *sans* glasses, mixed an entire bowl of horse radish (of which my mother was very fond) with the mashed potatoes. After eating the first spoonful he nearly passed out, and he thought he was having a heart attack (he probably was). Poor guy. He always got the brunt of things, as he was our "official taster." Another time the kids decided we would make the mashed potatoes. Did you grow up as I did with a mother that put every boxed item into a jar, then removed the label putting it inside the jar. In case it got lost she'd say "Ah, I'll remember what that is by the shape of it" or "I'll know what that is because we don't have many jars that look like this." Both were totally untrue. One cannot distinguish the nuances of baking soda from cornstarch if you are five. They are both white and look like flour. Quantity might have helped except with four kids she bought everything in large containers. So imagine our surprise when the biscuits looked miniature pancakes and were full of burn spots! I guess it's not as bad as the woman who called into WNPR the other day saying that unbeknownst to her that her son had scooped hands full of Legos into the turkey stuffing, which she only discovered when they went to eat. The helpful people at Butterball assured her that if she removed the stuffing, she should have no problem with the turkey (and we thought salmonella poisoning was all we all we had to keep our eye out for!) And by the way, did you know you can cook a turkey in a microwave? It has to weigh 12 lbs. or less, and it will be a bit messy, but the Butterball guys say otherwise the results will be no less than perfect! And for little bit of lite fare, here's a bit of trivia to finish out this year and to save for next year:

1. The first Thanksgiving celebration in 1621 lasted for three days, it included not only food, but also games.

2. Pulling the "wishbone" is an ageless tradition at Thanksgiving (and Christmas). Two people pull the turkey's breastbone apart, only the person who has the larger piece of bone is allowed to make a wish.
3. A full-grown turkey has over 3,000 feathers.
4. Firkee is the Native American name for this tasty bird. Firkee sounds a bit like turkey.
5. When a Tom turkey [male turkey] gobbles, it can be heard from as far away as a mile. In fact, only the Tom turkeys gobble, female turkeys make a clucking or clicking sounds.
6. Puritans from the Mayflower used to drink beer. This was probably weak 'boy's beer' and safer to drink than transporting water on a ship.
7. Benjamin Franklin proposed that the turkey should become the official bird of the United States. Turkeys now look jealously at the protected rights given to the Bald Eagle when they won the Official USA Bird status.
8. 87% of Americans eat turkey on Thanksgiving according to the National Turkey Federation. During a year the average American eats 17 pounds of turkey, which is the weight of a decent-sized bird.
9. Sorry to burst the bubble, but the Pilgrims on the first thanksgiving ate deer and not turkey.ⁱ

So I guess that we can put Thanksgiving to bed, other than to remind everyone that every day is Thanksgiving and we should live our lives as if it were so.

Today is what is known in the church and the wider church-at-large as "The Feast of Christ the King." The readings for the day appear twice a year, once before the beginning of Lent and once before the beginning of Advent, and contain the theme of Christ as King of Heaven and King of the World as found in *The Book of Revelation*. How is the date of the Feast of Christ the King determined? In *Quas Primas*, one of Pius XI's encyclicals, he established the celebration of the feast "on the last Sunday of the month of October—the Sunday, that is, which immediately precedes the Feast of All Saints." He tied it to All Saints Day because "before celebrating the triumph of all the Saints, we proclaim and extol the glory of him who triumphs in all the Saints and in all the Elect." With the revision of the Church's liturgical calendar in 1969, however, Pope Paul VI moved the Feast of Christ the King to the final Sunday of the liturgical year—that is, the last Sunday before the First Sunday of Advent. As such, it is a moveable feast; the date changes every year. Many Protestant churches also celebrate it, including those who use *The Common Lectionary*.ⁱⁱ

The encyclical upon which it is based is thankfully simple. At the end of it, the pope declares that he expects three "blessings to flow from the celebration of the feast: first, that people will doubtless be reminded that the Church, founded by Christ as a perfect society, has a natural and inalienable right to perfect freedom and immunity from the power of the state" (a war we will be fighting in the days ahead, I'm afraid); second, that "Nations will be reminded by the annual celebration of this feast that not only private individuals but also rulers and princes are bound to give public honor and obedience to Christ" (a hopeful illusion); and third, that "The faithful, moreover, by meditating upon these truths, will gain much strength and courage, enabling them to form their lives after the true Christian ideal (would that they would do so.)"ⁱⁱⁱ

The language excerpt seen here, first heard at the early part of *Revelation*, is laden with words that describe Christ. He is faithful to God's call, he died as a witness to his faith; he is the first recipient of the final resurrection; he, not the Emperor, is king of kings; he rules all things; he will come again with the clouds, that is as the presence of God, who is past, present and future, the A and Z of the Greek alphabet, the beginning and end of everything. The passage indicates that no one metaphor is sufficient in our descriptions of God.^{iv} So that is the long and short of it, take from other portions of the gospel and worked this morning into a framework for the story of Pilate and Jesus and their two different ways of exercising power: through force or through love. The kingdom moment ("My kingdom is not of this world") is one the most chilling portions of today's gospel text. I remember hearing it again during the broadcast of the musical *Jesus Christ, Superstar* on TV; when John Legend sings this short piece it literally pierces your soul. I feel the same way when I read this version in Scripture, but not because of what Jesus is not proclaiming. The theologians at the TOW project write that "Jesus is not saying that his kingdom is an ephemeral, internal experience based on economic, political, or social issues in the real world. As the *NRSV*, *the NIV*, and other translations indicate, his kingdom is instead from another realm (His rule—like he himself—originates from heaven.) But he has come to earth, and his kingdom is a real kingdom on this earth, more real than even Rome could ever be. His kingdom come to earth has a different set of operating principles. It is powerfully at work within the world, but it does not receive its marching orders from the present rulers of the world. Jesus doesn't explain at the time

what it means for his kingdom to be from another world yet in the world he himself constructed. But he reveals it in vivid terms later, in the vision reported in Revelation 21 and 22, when the New Jerusalem comes down out of heaven. Jesus' kingdom descends to take a place as a capital of this world, where all his disciples find their eternal home. Whenever Jesus speaks of eternal life or the kingdom of God, he is referring to the earth we inhabit now, transformed and perfected by the Word and the power of God.v

Are we ready for the kingdom of God? That of course is the age-old question. We certainly have heard, if from no one else than from me these past few months how and in what way we should be prepared for what is to come. We could use a bit of help on the vocabulary, and I dare say we could use a lot more study of the bible if we are to move ahead. I would like to be able to proclaim that we are a bible-centered church living in the midst of a community longing to hear the Word. That would take a lot of work. But with Advent just around the corner we the time we need to begin. I really hope you'll take a few moments to join with us in the reading of Monica Parr's *Christian Uncertainties* that will meet on Thursday mornings. It's a good book and it informed a lot of my early pastoring and ministry. I can still quote parts of it by heart today. And let's prepare our hearts and the places around us for Christmas. In keeping up with tradition I started last year, here is some Christmas trivia to guide you on your way: For 2018: (and before)

1. First Christmas: Rome, 336
2. First state to recognize Christmas: Alabama, 1836
3. Percentage of folks who celebrate Christmas: 92%
4. Percentage of folks who put up a Christmas tree: 79%
5. Largest exporter of Christmas trees: Canada
6. Folks who send Christmas cards: 65%
7. Folks who bought Christmas cards: 1.9 billion
8. Cost of the 12 days of Christmas: \$34,558.65
9. Santa appears in print for the first time: 1773
10. Poinsettias were first brought to the U.S. by Joel Poinsett in 1825.

Enjoy the days ahead. They have so much to offer!

AMEN!

(The Rev Dr.) Rayner W. Hesse, Jr.

Pastor, BBCC

ⁱ https://www.funny-jokes.com/humor/christmas/thanksgiving_trivia.htm#Funny_Thanksgiving_Trivia

ⁱⁱ <https://www.thoughtco.com/when-is-the-feast-of-christ-the-king-541624>

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid.*

^{iv} *Sundays and Seasons Preaching Year B*, 2018, 299.

^v <https://www.theologyofwork.org/new-testament/john/stranger-in-a-strange-land-john-18-20>