

Charlie, a new retiree-greeter at Wal-Mart, just couldn't seem to get to work on time. Every day he was 5, 10, 15 minutes late. But he was a good worker, really tidy, clean-shaven, sharp-minded, and a real credit to the company and obviously demonstrating their "Older Person Friendly" policies.

One day the boss called him into the office for a talk. "Charlie, I have to tell you, I like your work ethic, you do a bang-up job when you finally get here; but your being late so often is quite bothersome."

"Yes, I know boss, and I am working on it."

"Well good, you are a team player. That's what I like to hear."

"Yes sir, I understand your concern and I'll try harder."

Seeming puzzled, the manager went on to comment, "It's odd, though, you coming in late. I know you're retired from the Armed Forces. What did they say to you there if you showed up in the morning so late and so often?"

The old man looked down at the floor, and smiled. He chuckled quietly, then said with a grin, "They usually saluted and said, 'Good morning, Admiral, can I get your coffee, sir?'"

Isn't this a great little story? One way into today's theme of Christ the King Sunday, with its surprising share of role reversal....

Christ the King Sunday, the final Sunday in the turning of the Christian Year, the final Sunday before we gingerly tiptoe once again into the pregnant seasons of Advent and Christmas is a Sunday to both look back and look forward.

We look back upon the year now closing, a year of faith and worship, of service and witness. A year with its share of new things learned and new experiences shared, a year of gaining and losing, giving and gathering. A year in which we had opportunities to grow in faith, to better express the gentle, tender, forgiving love of Christ rather than the grudging love the product of our own fears or suspicions.

We look back upon a year in which when we meant to do better, in our own faith, in our patience with others, in our passion for justice and peace, and some of the time, we did indeed do better and some of the time... well some of the time we would rather forget how things turned out.

We look forward to the continued and renewed promise of all that God has yet to offer to us and all that God has for us yet to do and be. We anticipate another reminder and celebration of the birth of our King and our Savior, and all the enormous possibilities that this life holds for our lives and the life of the world.

Christ the King Sunday is therefore a gift that can help us end one year and begin the next reminded that what fully and finally matters is what we are doing in response to the claim that God has upon our lives in Jesus Christ.

Looking back, looking forward, either way, we see Christ the King. The King of all, yet born in fragility and obscurity! A Babe yet a King!

As you may know within our own family we are awaiting an arrival that we know will change our lives and change us, that will open us to something completely new, that we anticipate will bring, a mixture of great joy and much responsibility. I am speaking about the anticipated birth of our first grandchild to our daughter Jennifer and her husband, Ryan, on or about December 22! Of course the change in Janice and I's lives will be nothing like the change in the lives of these new parents.

It is a great joy that within the life of our church we have several couples anticipating the birth of a child. A word of advice, especially to and for you first time parents, none of us ever really fully knew all that would change with the birth of our first child until the enormity of everything was happening to us, until our world was being turned upside down and inside out!

One arrival, one new life, one little bitty baby and everything is reshaped, remade, reordered. One tiny life creating a whole new reality. Bursting in on us requiring a different focus, demanding an entirely new set of responses. One birth, birthing in others, many new and different things. Hope being birthed and born.

And thus it has always been and will always be for God's people. From Ephesians: "I pray that you may know the hope to which God has called you" (1:18).

This hope, this life with God –is the glorious inheritance we receive from God, an inheritance far more valuable than anything this world has to offer.

The center of our living is our expressing the truth that is at the heart of scripture and the faith of the church and which in a special way is celebrated and affirmed on this Christ the King Sunday. In short, in brief: Jesus rules.

God calls us and invites us to let this truth – Jesus rules - be our life and be the life of the church – Jesus rules!

As people our greatest influence comes when we live as disciples of Christ – living out in our world this truth – Jesus rules!

It is in following Jesus, Jesus who rules, that we experience the divine life and power of God that fills all things.

It is in following Jesus, Jesus who rules, that we are able to share the love and grace and hope and peace and forgiveness of our Lord.

It is in following Jesus, Jesus who rules that we are able to step forward in mission and service, sharing the good news of God's love by word and deed.

It is in following Jesus, Jesus who rules, that we can embrace and accept the challenge of expressing the whole life of God in the life of the world, such that we are forever free to recognize the image of God in each person.

The God we worship, the God we acknowledge as King, the God to whom we pray is not a distant, impersonal potentate. Rather the God we encounter or maybe better yet the God who encounters us is the God who is intimately involved in the life of the Christian community and the life of the world. This God, the God we know in Jesus Christ, is the God who kneels in love and service before us, and who calls us to do the same for the least and the last and the lost.

The original version of this story had the title: "The face is familiar." Trinity College in Cambridge has a long-held tradition of sending their students to the slums of South London to do community service. They serve in the parish of Camberwell. At night they sleep in the Parish Hall, and by day they do necessary repairs and cleaning in the homes of the poorer people in the area.

Some years ago, one such student was helping do some repairs of a bed-ridden elderly woman. As the student worked, she asked, "Has anyone ever told you that you look a lot like Prince Charles?" Since no one had, indeed, ever said such a thing to him, he replied, "No." "Well," she said, "I am surprised. You are the spitting image of him, you are. Even to my poor eyes you look just like him."

Till the day she died the woman did not know that her drains were indeed cleaned by Prince Charles the heir to the British crown. It's not that royalty was unrecognized; it was just that in that ordinary, down-to-earth situation in an old woman's kitchen, it was inconceivable that she could be visited by a king.

My hope for all of you and for OAPC is that you, me, and all of us, can be encouraged today, this Thanksgiving, and as we move into Advent and thence to Christmas, to know that we have been and are being and will be visited by a King, by King Jesus.

Our King Jesus asks each of you and all of us, to recognize and welcome Him, to open our lives in a new and deeper way to the hope to which we are called. The hope that resides in Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, the King of Kings is the hope that describes our identity and ought to shape our living. Be on the look out! Look! Watch! Listen! King Jesus is now and will be calling upon you – be ready to recognize and welcome Jesus who is the hope to which we are called. Amen.