

The End Is Here!

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Sermon for November 21, 2004

Lessons for Christ the King Sunday in Year C

Jeremiah 23:1-6

Psalm 46

Colossians 1:11-20

Luke 23:33-43

Behold! The end is here!

Not near. But *here*. Today. Well, actually, I'm not exactly sure about that. I'm not sure whether today is really the end, or simply the beginning of the end.

For you see, today is Christ the King Sunday. The last Sunday of the church year. And this is why I'm a bit confused. I know it's the last Sunday of the church year, but is it also the very last day of the church year, or the beginning of the last week? Does it really matter?

The end is here, and with endings come beginnings. As a kid I always wondered why graduations were called commencements. After all, commence means to *begin*, and everyone knows that graduations are about *endings*. It was later on that I understood that graduations were really about both - the end of the preparations, and the commencement of what you were preparing for.

Behold! The end is here, and the beginning is near!

We're at the last Sunday of the church year and we have a view to the first Sunday of the next. It's not Advent yet, but we can see it from here, and Jeremiah has told us

about it. His words at the end of the year are very similar to the words we'll hear for the first four weeks of the next:

"Behold the days are coming," says the Lord, "when I shall raise to David a branch of righteousness. A king shall reign and prosper, and execute judgment and righteousness in the earth..."

In Advent we'll hear John the Baptist tell us to repent because the king is coming, as we've heard him tell us so many times before. But maybe in the coming year we'll hear him differently. Maybe we'll hear him telling us we have the **opportunity** to repent because the king is coming, rather than warning us that we must.

But that's next week and next year, and I'll let Fritz deal with that. What of today?

The end is here, and a king is coming. A different kind of king than the Israelites imagined, or than we usually do. Definitely a different kind of king from a different kind of royalty than Amelia Mignoate Thermopolis Rinaldi could imagine.

If that name sounds familiar to you, then you know I'm talking about Mia Thermopolis, heroine of the many **The Princess Diaries**, books and the two movies loosely based on them.

For those of you who aren't familiar with either, 14-year-old, geeky, gawky, and socially inept Mia has her life totally turned upside down when she is told that she is the sole heir to the throne of the small European principality of Genovia. Contrary to most girls, whom she is told would find this to be a dream come true, she finds this to be a nightmare that intrudes on her being able to live a normal life. Well, at least as normal a life as any geeky, gawky, socially inept 14-year-old girl could. This just adds one more big complication to her life.

But more than that, she just doesn't see herself as princess material. Princesses have perfect lives, they're beautiful, their hair isn't frizzy and triangular, they're not failing algebra, and they're not flat-chested.

She can't really be a princess because she doesn't fit her preconceived notion of what a princess is supposed to be like.

The king that is coming next year is a king who is unlike any king we've seen before. He will be about justice and righteousness, not about power and privilege. He will be like a shepherd, but not like the old shepherds who scattered the sheep and even preyed upon them. He will be the shepherd who lays his life down for the sheep. He will be a king who comes to reign by serving.

And this is a king much different than many people could imagine, and who will not be recognized by most of the people he will come to serve. Because many people, like Mia, will confuse the normal trappings of royalty with the reality of royalty.

And the people stood by watching; but the leaders scoffed at him, saying, "He saved others, let him save himself, if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!" The soldiers also mocked him...saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!"

This king will not use his power for the short-term goal of saving himself and impressing the immediate audience. But rather, for the long-term goal of saving **us** and the audiences in generations to come.

And yes, this king will be maddeningly silent when we feel that we need to hear from him the most, and will appear to not even save **us** when we call on him, but perhaps this is just another thing we don't understand, because despite all we know about this new king, we're still limited by our own small imaginations.

The end is here! The king is coming! We **may** repent! We may rejoice! Happy new year!

Amen.