

Some among us this afternoon may be wondering why we have read two scripture lessons this evening—first, the Hebrew prophet Zechariah’s reference to the king appearing in Zion riding on a donkey; and the second lesson from Matthew in which we hear of the appearance of Jesus arriving in Jerusalem, also on a donkey. Why are we reading these two scripture lessons this night, the last Sunday of the liturgical year when we traditionally associate these two scripture readings with Holy Week? You may remember references to Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem with which Holy Week opens. On Palm Sunday Jesus rides on a donkey and is at first hailed as a King, and then, in an extraordinary turn of events, is cut down by the Roman and religious authorities as well as the crowd who hailed him as their King. You will remember the excruciating events of the last week of Jesus’ life—betrayal, incarceration, trial, humiliation, crucifixion and death on the cross. And where from the human point of view this seemingly ends Jesus’ life and story, we also know by faith that everything that gives meaning to our lives is transformed again as Jesus is raised from the dead on the third day. For what reason do we read these passages on this the 28th and last Sunday after Pentecost?

We do so because Catholic, Episcopal and Lutheran churches in the latter part of the 20th century have begun to claim this last Sunday after Pentecost as Christ the King Sunday. After all the stories, examples and portrayals of Jesus through these weeks since Pentecost—miracles, teachings, sayings, healings, and revelations, we affirm that this Jesus of Nazareth, this son of Mary and Joseph, brother to James and Andrew, this generous, loving, forgiving man with power to heal the sick, raise the dead, roll back storms, and warmly and gently embrace children is none other than the Son of God, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords—the one whom the scriptures and all of life points to as the salvation of the world.

So here we are on a Sunday evening, the last Sunday of the liturgical year. When many of us next gather for worship, (other than prayers of thanksgiving I hope we shall offer with family and friends acknowledging our many blessings and the bounty of God this Thursday) when we next gather in this or some other church, it will be the first Sunday of Advent, the first Sunday of a new liturgical year.

And from all I have read and heard from many, this new year—whether counted liturgically beginning next week, or marked by the calendar on the first day of 2009, this new year will be one of great, great challenge. Our ways and practices to which we have become accustomed in recent years will change. This new year will require of us new perspectives, new habits, new practices, especially new believing. And when I say believing, I mean that so much and so many things to which we have looked for assurance and comfort in the recent past will, and can no longer, hold our attention and especially our dreams.

What I and this church, and all churches hope for is that we will be able to turn from our recent ways, and that we will see and know and believe that God is calling to something different, and something new, and something that is and will be filled with God. Indeed, perhaps where in recent years we have hoped to find something grand and majestic out there ahead of us, we now find something that has been all around us all this time—which is Christ in our lives without great fanfare and trumpets—simply and in great humility, even riding on an ass.

I hope and pray this new year we shall be a pilgrim community daring to embark on a journey—to recover the deepest, most real meaning of life. We are a people who can forge new faith even in a frightening and fragmented world. Like Jesus who entered the holy city of Jerusalem, we, too, can enter this new year embodying courage, creativity, imagination, and risk. Someone once said that the primary job of the church is to be a spiritual community forming people in faith. I invite you to join me and others at Christ & Holy Trinity this new year as we reclaim our spirituality and our faith—a community that will both point to and connect all of us, young and older, to the traditions, stories, prayer and worship that is the way of daring, believing, loving people.