

Today, on Christ the King Sunday and the Sunday immediately following the Thanksgiving weekend, my imagination goes to the disciples and their travels. They traveled with Jesus in a time when houses were very small, boats were small, and they went everywhere together. A traveling group of 13 and probably many more, staying together, eating together, walking together, doing everything together. I remember a business trip I was on once. There were just 6 of us, and we traveled together for three weeks. And because we only had one rental car, we were always waiting for one person to stop to go to the bathroom, discussing where we were going to eat, who was going to rent the car in their name, and so on. On a snowy night in Wisconsin, something happened in the car, I won't say what, but it smelled bad, and we were so tired of each other that no one said anything, but all four windows in the car went down at the same time despite the frigid temperatures.

Now, we were not friends, and we didn't particularly like each other, which made things worse. However, even when you do like each other, it's difficult to be in close quarters. I imagine that Jesus and the disciples had some tense times, and there are Gospel passages that show the tension. Like a holiday weekend, which can be glorious or can be a very difficult time, I imagine that Jesus and the disciples had similar ups and downs.

Now the disciples and Jesus were intimate friends. He was teacher, mentor, pastor, and prophet to them. They had a fully human experience of each other. There was something more. There were moments when Jesus was more than human: he walked on the water to them, he calmed seas, he healed people of diseases and raised the dead. This person, this human being, this intimate friend was more than any other human being they knew. And there were times when it was overwhelming to them. Three of the disciples followed Jesus to Mount Tabor, and upon return tried to describe what had happened to others and the words couldn't describe it. The awe they felt in the presence of their intimate friends could not be recounted in full. Remember the calming of the storm? Peter senses that this man Jesus is more than their intimate friend. He falls at Jesus' feet, telling him that he isn't worthy to be in his presence. The disciples, the close and intimate friends of Jesus, sense that there is something in him that brings about majesty and awe and respect, and despite not fully understanding, they remain drawn to him.

But what about us today? We can't touch or see Jesus in the way that the disciples did, yet there is a way for intimacy and awe in our relationship with Christ the King. And a lot of times it comes through our relationships with other people.

It's been about 10 years ago, but a dear friend of mine was dying. She was in her early nineties, and until a year prior to her death, she was very active. She was a friend of my mother's who made a place for me in her home when I moved to Atlanta more than 35 years ago. She lived in Midtown, sticking it out through all the neighborhood changes. I

tagged along with her to every club meeting held in the city of Atlanta – Fernbank, Atlanta Sharks, a rock club, a hiking club, the Single Saints at All Saints'. We ushered at every play in Atlanta, went to Scottish dances and many other things I no longer remember. After six months of living with her, I moved into my own apartment. Several years after that, her upstairs apartment tenant moved, and I became her new tenant and lived there for the next several years.

When she was dying, she was well enough for a while to live in an assisted living place, near her son in Kennesaw. It was a huge change for her, of course, and very far away from Midtown. I was hesitant to visit her, to know what to do for her, or if she'd even be lucid that day. But I went to see her, and that visit is my favorite memory of her. The room, unlike her large house, was tiny with just two sitting chairs, a coffee table and a single bed. We talked about where to sit. We even tried the floor – she was always very agile even in her 90's – but nothing was very comfortable for her. We finally agreed that lying across her single bed would be the most comfortable for her, so I joined her. As we lay there, legs dangling over the bed looking at the ceiling, we chatted like little girls. We also talked about how many hours she had looked at that blank, white ceiling and how boring it was. She was an avid reader but could no longer read because of dizziness when she sat up. She was never a fan of television. Confined to bed, that ceiling was her only companion. We talked about all the things we might be able to do to help make it more interesting in her room and specifically what might be done about that boring ceiling, but we didn't come up with anything. Nothing got fixed, her health was no better and her room was no less boring than before I went. What did happen, though, is that we were together and enjoying each other's company. I got to be with her, close to her death, and I hope her loneliness was abated for a short time. Being with her, not doing anything spectacular or particularly helpful, is what was needed. The intimacy in our friendship was palpable, as was the presence of Christ.

We all want to touch something bigger than ourselves, something which has significance, something that will help us grow in the image of Christ. I'm sure you each have stories that remind you of the presence of Christ.

Earlier in November was the feast day of St. Elizabeth. She grew up the daughter of a king. Born into royalty, she was betrothed to the future Germanic King Ludwig and sent to live with his family when she was just 4 years old. She and Ludwig grew up together and eventually married. From all accounts they had a very loving marriage. However, the royal family vehemently disliked Elizabeth because she did things like selling the crown jewels to build a hospital for the sick and opening the palace granaries to feed the poor. Once, when she was about 7, she, the queen and the queen's daughter, decked out in finery and royal crowns of gold and gems, went to worship. When Elizabeth saw Jesus on the cross wearing a crown of thorns, she threw off her crown of gems, and her finery, and prostrated herself in front of the crucifix. Embarrassed by her behavior, the queen demanded that she get up and put her crown on. "How can I wear a crown of gold and gems when my Lord is wearing a crown of thorns and suffering?" When Elizabeth refused to get up, the queen and her daughter, to save face, likewise removed their crowns and prostrated themselves.

I think that Elizabeth's question is at the heart of today's Gospel. "How can we wear a crown of gold and gems when our Lord is wearing a crown of thorns and suffering?" Jesus is present with all of these, the least of these, the sick, the hungry, the thirsty, the naked, the unwelcomed, the lonely, the prisoners. Churched or unchurched, Jesus is present with them just as he is with us.

Today is Christ the King Sunday. It marks the end of the church year, the last day after Pentecost. The concept of kingship is something foreign to most of us as a lived idea. We don't have a king; in fact we defeated the king in our history and became a country independent of a monarchy. So the notion, I would guess, is one that is hard to wrap our minds around.

The kingship of Jesus is radically different, though. One of the ways that we know the kingship of Jesus is through the faces of other people. Our intimate friends, but also all of the people that are mentioned in our Gospel today. When we are not in relationship with any of the people that Jesus is talking about in our Gospel lesson today, we miss knowing Jesus in full. This is part of the reason that reaching out to our neighbors who want to learn to speak English is important to us, as well. It began with the vestry's question several years ago of "Who is our neighbor?"

Next week is the first Sunday of Advent and the beginning of the church year. This past Sunday in our annual meeting, we continued the question of who our neighbor is, and adopted the opportunity brought to the parish to build beds for children through the organization Sleep in Heavenly Peace. You will hear more about it soon.

I want to challenge us to take today's Gospel passage to heart and ask the hard question of how we serve Jesus in this community around us. Knowing people who are different from us is our call from the Gospel today. If we dare to know their names, our crowns of gold and gems will feel uncomfortable, too. As with our outreach to teach English, we are changed by our relationships with one another, and they serve us in that way just as we are serving them.

Asking the question of who our neighbor is, demands that we know suffering's name. It demands that we read the Gospel with ears to listen and will to act, and demands that we pay attention to the whole body of Christ. Food, water, clothing, shelter, a sense of belonging – they are essential elements of our humanity and are important to the living Christ, our true king. Amen.