Christ the King Sunday
The Reverend Emmanuel Ato Mercer

Today we celebrate Christ as the king of Kings and Lord of Lords. The idea of the kingship of Christ taps into the Christian understanding of the Jesus story, that through the resurrection of Jesus, God has vindicated the one who died for our sakes. This single act of the Innocent Sufferer not only validates God's ultimate desire for the human race, but it sets the humanity on a path that is oriented toward the one who proffers ultimate value on each and all.

One thing, which was most certain to the disciples of Jesus, was, they knew that there was something special about him. Whatever he may have been, it wasn't entirely clear. So, they could not ascribe any divine status to his person until his vindication. Their interpretation of the events of his life was enough for them to re-interpret his life as one who embodied the nature, qualities and disposition of God but of human as well. Paul in his letter to the Ephesians affirms the vindication of Christ and assures his readers that Christ, who was raised from the dead, has now been seated on his throne in the heavens, with enormous authority and power which he will employ during the judgment.

Over the years, however, the divine nature has slowly swallowed up the human qualities to the extent that we are confronted with a nature that is so perfect, lofty and far beyond our capability. A nature that is so flawless that it appears humanely impossible to imitate his life. The Jesus who as both God and man could not stand aloof or be indifferent to human suffering, has had his humanity so obscured and painted beyond recognition that, you and I either have to be God in order to be as just as he was, or we have to be God in order to be compassionate, compassionate enough to reject the human tendency to be indifferent to the needs of the poor, hungry, thirsty, naked, sick, stranger and the imprisoned.

One of the stories that has disproportionately helped propel the divinity of Jesus over and above his humanity, where we actually fail to recognize his humanity in our own lives and the lives of others is the gospel story that was just read to us. Over the past several weeks, we have heard parables of the coming kingdom, but today's story isn't a parable, it is a narration of a future event; the kingdom has finally arrived and now the king is seated on his

throne, ready to judge. Surprisingly, the king isn't judging only the people of Israel or a select group of people; rather, he is judging everyone from all the nations. This is such an expansive role for the king, for if anyone thought he/she can escape the long reach of the king's arm, this text turns that assumption upside-down and establishes the universal role of the king as judge over all nations and peoples.

As the king sat in judgment, he separated the sheep from the goats, rewarded the sheep with eternal fellowship and the goats wit eternal condemnation. Both groups appear very surprised by the methodology the king used in differentiating one from the other, and so they asked just about the same question desiring to know when it happened. When did it happen? When did we see you sick, hungry, naked, thirsty, a stranger, homeless and in prison and visited or did not visit you?

They appear very surprised because they thought the king will use different metrics to judge them, and not base his judgment on their response to those who were in some form of distress or need. They did not think that the practical demonstration of love will be the ultimate proof or measure by which they will be judged.

Let's not be confused, it isn't the case that God dwells more in the distressed or needy person and dwells less in those who aren't. God dwells in equal measure in each one of us; whether hungry or not, thirsty or not, homeless or not, naked or fully clothed and in imprisoned or free.

But in as much God dwells in equal measure in each of us, we do not all possess the same gifts, and even if we do, we do not possess gifts in the same quantity, nor do we possess the same abilities and strengths. We don't come from the same background nor did we grow up in the same neighborhood.
These are some of the core differences that compel us to approach life with a deep sense of gratitude and a fair understanding of our responsibility to ourselves and to others.

When I first arrived in the United States as a student, I knew I had to find a church to attend on Sunday. But since I didn't know of any church nor was I aware of which Episcopal

Church will be closer to my apartment, I went with my roommates –who were also students, to their school library to use a computer. When I arrived at the library and found a computer, I went on Google and typed 'Episcopal Churches in Atlanta, the first church that came up was All Saints Episcopal Church-which also had the picture of the rector standing in the pulpit.

Without any knowledge or information about the church, I simply told my room-mate that that was where I will worship on Sunday. I wrote down the address, checked the train schedule and made my plans for Sunday.

And so on Sunday, we rode the train to All Saints. After the service I introduced myself to the rector. He suggested that I call the office on Monday and make an appointment to see him. I called his office on Monday, and went to see him on Wednesday. Just before our meeting was over, he asked if I would be interested in a job. I answered yes, and he said, well, you have a job. I was stunned. I couldn't believe what he said.

The fact is, he didn't know me, he knew nothing about me, and he didn't even have to offer me a job. He was not obligated to extend any hand of support. In fact I was not even registered with the national Church nor was I known anywhere in the United States. But not only did he embrace me, the entire parish did. I have not asked him why he decided to take a bet on an African priest with an accent, a priest who didn't have any recommendation or reference in the United States.

I figured that he knew he could not be indifferent to an African priest who had no idea how he will survive in a new country and city. He more than gave me food to eat, clothes to wear and home to sleep; he exemplified for me what it meant to go beyond ourselves in making life a little comfortable for the least among us, even for the stranger.
In just the same way, there are many, many of us in this parish who work so hard to make life worth living for the hungry, homeless and the poor. And many of you brought a frozen turkey to be donated to the hungry and poor who patronize Face-to-Face and Church of the Advocate.

The hardcore fact is, we do not have to do it-we are not required by any law to extend ourselves in service to the least in our midst. We owe the hungry, poor, homeless, thirsty, naked and the imprisoned no duty to care for them, and no civil authority will indict us for not feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, providing a home for the homeless. But we do it anyway, and we do it because the hope to which we have been called compels us not to be indifferent. The hope to which we have been called compels us to respond to human need like the Savior did. The hope to which we have been called is anchored not in our deep understanding of doctrine, but in our humble approach to the least in our midst.

To think about the kingship of Christ, we must understand that it isn't territorial, because territory connotes the idea of boundaries, and boundaries are themselves not only restrictive but they ostracize. The idea of boundaries serves only to differentiate and place undue limitations on others. As a result, the kingship of Christ cannot be territorial, because it cannot be subjected to the limitations of boundaries.

Rather, it is the kind of kingship whose domain is the heart; a kingship that rules over the heart-the seat of compassion. And because we take our hearts with us wherever we go, we always carry the King and his kingdom with us. And because the king is with us, we refuse to be indifferent to the hungry, thirsty, homeless, stranger, sick, naked or imprisoned.

Although we may owe no duty to care, yet, we also cannot be indifferent. Sheer acts of kindness bring us ever closer to the kingdom of God. And almost always, it is our response to human need that makes the kingship of Christ accessible and relevant to us and to others. Thank you for bringing all those turkeys. Amen.