Be Love (9/1/2024)

# GREEN

15th Sunday after Pentecost James 1:17-27

In her book “The Gift to Listen, The Courage to Hear” the Rev. Dr. Cari Jackson describes the impact soul listening has on our relationships with God and one another.

Soul listening is not to be confused with active listening, which is what we are taught early in life to succeed in the world. The goal of active listening is mutual understanding.

Soul listening’s goal, though, is to discover the riches buried deeply within our souls. It makes visible the divine within each of us. This kind of listening, writes Jackson, tells others that they are “important, loved and valued.”

Soul listening gets to the heart of what James was saying to the Christians scattered outside of Israel when he wrote “be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger.”

Even in an ancient society void of voicemails and texting, James observed how the torrential downpour of words could do more harm than good. For when we are quick to fill those pregnant pauses — which are vital in forming thoughtful, loving responses — we drown out the voice of the Holy One who is always among us.

How many misunderstandings, fights, break-ups and church splits might have been avoided if only we listened — soul listened — first?

James’ words come to us today not as a tip on how to better communicate with one another, but rather on how to better love one another.

Twentieth-century theologian, Paul Tillich, believed that listening and love were intertwined, writing that, “the first duty to love was to listen.”

Life doesn’t need to be hard or heated or hurtful. Listen with love to your friends and family. Listen with love to the stranger you meet.

Listen with love to the one you might disagree with. Listen to the one who is crying or laughing. More importantly, listen to the one who is silent. Listen with your soul, not your ears.

## *Divine Listener, who never fails to hear my cries, help me this day to* listen to others with the same love and understanding you show me. May this day I talk less, and soul listen more. Amen.

Be Opened (9/8/2024)

# GREEN

16th Sunday after Pentecost Mark 7:24-37

Can you imagine your life being changed for the better with just a gentle touch, a loving word or even a compassionate smile?

The people we encounter in Mark’s Gospel can. Their stories, packed into what is the shortest of the four gospels, tell of how the Son of God brings healing and hope to *all* he meets.

Rich, poor, men, women, children, sinners, outcasts — it doesn’t matter who you are. There’s nothing Jesus can’t do to turn our lives around. But for that to happen, we must ask: Are we opened to the Divine impossible possibilities?

Mark brings us today a perfect illustration of new life in the healing of the deaf and mute man.

In the story, Jesus starts by placing his fingers in the deaf man’s ears. Jesus is acknowledging nonverbally his understanding of what the problem is. It’s a loving act that puts the man at ease.

He then spits on his fingers and touches the deaf man’s tongue. Yes, a cringy moment for our modern sensibilities, but spit was believed to have healing qualities in ancient times.

The final step in this healing comes with Jesus’ sigh, “Ephphatha!” — which is Aramaic for “be opened.”

And with that, a man whose life was closed from the community because of his disability, opens to belonging and acceptance.

The word “Ephphatha” only appears eight times in the New Testament, almost always with stories of healing. It is a word, though, that we should add to our spiritual vocabularies, as the reminder to “be opened” is an important one in the healing of whatever needs to be healed in our lives.

Too often doubt and cynicism take over our lives, closing us off to the that healing of body, mind and spirit. Yet Jesus sees our situations and sighs, “Be opened!” For what has being closed to God’s possibilities done for us?

In the Catholic tradition there is an optional baptismal rite that parents can request as part of the sacrament where the priest says a prayer as he touches the infant’s ears and then mouth. The prayer is for the child to hear God’s voice and to speak of God’s grace as they grow. As you might have already guessed, it is known as the Ephphatha Rite.

Take a moment this day to touch your ears and then your mouth, praying to hear the Divine speaking to you and for the grace to speak words of love.

## *Caring Healer, may today we “be opened” to the many ways you are* renewing, reviving and restoring us. May we hear Your Son’s loving word spoken to us now and always, “Ephphatha!” Amen.

Who Are You, Jesus? (9/15/2024)

# GREEN

17th Sunday after Pentecost Mark 8:27-38

“Who do people say I am?”

Jesus is certainly brave in asking this question. Think about it. Would you really want to hear how someone perceived you? We all have an image we think we are putting out to the universe that is often perceived differently by others.

But Jesus, who is preparing his followers for his impending death — wants to see if the ragtag bunch is understanding the cost that comes with picking up the cross.

Of course, Peter, the one who leaps before looking, jumps right in with the bold proclamation, “You are the Messiah.”

Good job, Peter. Even though you still don’t quite understand what you just said. That will come — in time.

Your turn now. Who do you say Jesus is?

Before you give the Sunday school answer you were taught years ago, stop. Really give it some thought. Who would you say Jesus is for you right now? Your answer might just reveal where you are on your faith journey.

A pastor once asked a group of second graders the “Who is Jesus?” question. Their answers were of course adorable.

*Jesus is my teddy bear. Jesus is my cookie monster. Jesus is my best pal. Jesus is my boo-boo healer.*

A few years later, the pastor asked that same group of children, now teens preparing for confirmation, the same question. Who do you say Jesus is?

This time, the answers were not so adorable. Rather, they were raw and revealing.

*Jesus is my safe place. Jesus is my sponsor. Jesus is my secret keeper. Jesus is the parent I wished I had.*

The reality is that there will be many different Jesus’ who walk alongside us, being for us the unwavering love and hope needed as we change, grow and move on to new stages in life either willingly or unwillingly. And that is the beauty of our Lord’s question. It reminds us that through it all, he is always exactly what we need.

Yes, Jesus is our Messiah. He is our Lord and Savior. He is also our Safe Place, our Secret Keeper, our Heartbreak Healer …

Once again, it’s your turn now. Spend some time in prayer, pondering Jesus’ question that he asks of you: “Who do you say I am?”

## *Jesus, you are my , and I thank you* for your unwavering love and care in each stage of my life. Amen.

First in Caring (9/22/2024)

# GREEN

18th Sunday after Pentecost. Mark 9:30-37

It’s so easy for us to pick on the disciples for bickering about who is the greatest, especially after Jesus told them for a second time that the Son of God will be handed over, tried and put to death.

Yes, but … which one of us is the greatest?

We can pick on them or we can take a step back and see how many times in our desire for greatness — measured by the riches, power and prestige the world offers — we miss the life Jesus is calling us to.

When Jesus discovers that this is what his followers were arguing about behind his back, he calls a time out. He then picks up a child for a quick sermon illustration. See this little one? Greatness doesn’t come from what you can achieve or gain. Greatness comes from what you do to help the helpless and the vulnerable. Jesus then adds, “anyone who want to be first, must be last.”

Our Savior’s words go against everything we are taught in life, where first place is coveted and grabbing the prize is the goal.

In 1983, Harvard Divinity School appointed Henri J.M. Nouwen, a Dutch priest, theologian and author, to the position of Professor of Divinity. After only one academic year, Nouwen surprised his Ivy League colleagues by resigning from the prestigious position so that he could serve as chaplain for the L’Arche Daybreak community in Toronto — a place where disabled adults and their caregivers lived together.

But it was at L’Arche that Nouwen met a young man, Adam, who could neither speak nor move without assistance. Nouwen would later reflect that it was his time at L’Arche, and especially Adam, that gave his life purpose.

“The people I live with sometimes have a very hard time believing they are chosen,” wrote Nouwen. “They suffer, not so much from their mental handicap, but from the feeling of being not wanted, not desired.”

Nouwen stepped away from the world’s greatness and by doing so illustrated the power of divine greatness.

“Who among us is the greatest?” It is the one who creates a more loving and welcoming place for the Adams of the world.

## *Loving God, may today we discover, in serving others, that last place is* a glorious position to be in, for it is there your kin-dom work is done.

*Amen.*

Courage for Community (9/29/2024)

# GREEN

19th Sunday after Pentecost Esther 7:1-6, 9-10; 9:20-22

An ad sponsored by the Foundation to Combat Antisemitism, which ran during last winter’s Super Bowl, reminded viewers that silence isn’t golden when others are being persecuted.

It featured Clarence B. Jones, a civil rights activist and draft speechwriter for Martin Luther King Jr., who, as images of hate flashed on the screen, spoke these words, “All hate thrives on one thing: silence.”

A Jewish woman named Esther, who would become Queen of Persia, knew all about speaking up for the good of a community. Her story, recorded in the Book of Esther, tells of the Jewish people living in exile in Persia after the destruction of the First Temple. Under the reign of King Achashverosh, a royal advisor named Haman concocted a plot to wipe out the Persian Jewish community. Esther, along with her

guardian, Mordechai, were able to foil Haman’s plot and save the Jewish community.

At the climax of this story, when the Jewish community of Persia is facing imminent destruction, Mordechai calls on Esther to speak up on behalf of the Jewish people. Esther hesitates at first for she fears her own safety, being a Jew herself in the inner court. Mordechai reminds her that she is forever tied to the Jewish people and that her voice needs to be heard.

In the end, Esther speaks up and her people are saved. To this day, Esther is remembered and celebrated as a hero and an advocate on the Jewish celebration known as Purim.

The need to speak is great, yet still so very scary for many of us as we fear our own safety and security. Throughout history, though, God calls for voices like Esther’s, like Clarence B. Jones’ — like yours —to speak for those whose voices are not being heard.

Ask God for the courage to do so and trust the words to come.

## *Loving God, give us the courage of Esther to speak up when we see* communities hurting. May our words not be confrontational or hateful. Rather, may they be filled with love and point to your glory. Amen.

### October 2024 Years B/C

Enfolding Love (10/6/2024)

### GREEN

20th Sunday after Pentecost. Mark 10:2-16

Many times we find ourselves skipping over the topic of divorce that we have in the first part of Mark 10:2-16, in favor of the more polite dinner conversation of Jesus blessing the children.

Divorce is never easy to discuss. It’s deeply personal with complexities unique to each couple. Yet many still weigh in with their opinions, just as they did in Jesus’ day.

Here, it’s the religious legal experts — the Pharisees — who bring the topic to Jesus, hoping to catch the rising star of the Galilee in a false statement.

They ask straight out, “Is divorce lawful?”

At the time, there were two main teachings about divorce circulating among the Jews. There was the teaching of Hillel, a liberal rabbi, and then there was the more conversative rabbi, Shammai. The Pharisees wanted to know which camp Jesus was in. Neither.

Jesus was in the God camp, reminding them — and us — that life is complicated and messy. It is only God who knows each tangled heart intimately.

Jesus proceeds to answer their question by asking one of his own, “What did Moses say?” The Pharisees acknowledge that Moses allowed a certificate of dismissal.

And there you go. Moses allowed — not God, Jesus points out. It was never the plan for God’s beloveds to experience the heartache of separation.

In a perfect world, there would be a love so strong that the ties that bind would never break. But we don’t live in a perfect world. We live in a fallen one where God has given us free will to make decisions. Thankfully, God’s redeeming love has the power to repair the brokenness in our lives.

Let’s now go beyond married couples. What about the “divorces” — the breakups and breakdowns — among siblings, co-workers, church members and dear friends?

What if we realize that our fragile hearts are always at risk of the “hardening” that Jesus spoke of which led Moses to allow certificates of dismissal among God’s children?

What if this day we made a vow to all humanity to keep our hearts forever opened, allowing the space for the Spirit to come and heal the hurts, forgive the betrayals and grant the patience needed in our trying moments?

What if the pressing question isn’t about the lawfulness of divorce, but more about the condition of our hearts?

*Loving God, we pray for Your enfolding love to come into our lives — revive relationships that are languishing, mend families who are torn, and grant peace and understanding for those whose partnerships have ended. May our hearts soften and beat in sync with Yours. Amen.*

What Must I Do? (10/13/2024) 21st Sunday after Pentecost **GREEN**

Mark 10:17-31

There’s a contemporary hymn — a fun one to sing with children — that goes, *“I have decided to follow Jesus, no turning back, no turning back.”*

Sadly, the young man in today’s lesson from the Gospel of Mark was never taught the song, as he turns back after hearing what it takes to follow Jesus.

So eager at first, he proudly tells Jesus how he has followed the commandments since he was a boy. That’s great, Jesus affirms, before saying the one word we dread to hear — *but*.

You can follow me, **but** you must sell all you have. We are told that the young man owned many possessions, too many to part with. He walks away from Jesus greatly grieved.

Jesus then turns to his disciples who have witnessed this encounter, saying to them, “It is easier for a camel to go through an eye of a needle than for someone rich to enter the Kingdom.”

“Who then can be saved?” they ask.

Excellent question, for we all come to Jesus with possessions we dearly hold onto. They don’t necessarily have to be riches in the way of a robust real estate portfolio or soaring stocks and bonds. “Costly” possessions can be anything that cost us from going deeper in our walk with Christ.

As early at the 9th century there was an interpretation of Jesus’ “eye of a needle” illustration that went beyond an actual sewing needle. It was said that the “Eye of the Needle” was a small gate in Jerusalem in which merchants traveling at night would enter through, as the main gate would have been closed.

If the merchant’s camel was carrying a heavy load, though, the animal would not have been able to get through the gate. To squeeze through the “Eye of the Needle,” the merchant would have to remove all the treasures that were piled high onto the beast of burden’s back.

Such a gate has never been verified by scholars, but the image of an actual camel carrying a heavy load, and a narrow gate helps us to better understand what Jesus was saying about what it takes to follow him.

We all go through life with baggage — things that we insist on holding on to that weigh us down and prevent us from the life Jesus has for us.

What is Jesus asking us to let go of so that we can follow him unencumbered and with great joy? Will we find ourselves singing this day, *“I have decided to follow Jesus. No turning back! No turning back!”*

*God, whose riches are not of this world, help us take inventory of the very things that are keeping us from truly following Your Son, Jesus. Give us the strength to let go and trust the path Jesus invites us on. Amen.*

Great Service (10/20/2024) 22nd Sunday after Pentecost. **GREEN**

Mark 10:35-45

The committee tasked with updating the church’s mission statement gathered in the drafty fellowship hall. They had been sitting in rickety wooden chairs much longer than they had wanted, getting nowhere with a statement that would miraculously guide them towards a future full of hope. Back and forth the suggestions went.

*A church for worshipping God and loving others.*

Good, but what about …

*We seek to love our neighbors as we love ourselves.*

Scratch it. The church down the block says that. How about …

*Empowered by God to reach others for God.*

Some heads nodded “yay”; others nodded “nay.” Silence ensued. Finally, a teen invited to the group to share their youthful viewpoint, spoke softly, suggesting:

*We have come to serve, not to be served.*

Eyes lit up. Smiles smoothed wrinkled frowns. A new mission statement — echoing Jesus’ words in Mark that the “Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve” — was adopted, putting the church on a path of revival where the needs of others came before their own.

Sometimes we forget that the church was not established to serve us nor cater to our whims — singing hymns we love or keeping those antique pews rather than replacing them with folding chairs.

Even before the church became an institution, James and John, followers of Jesus, found themselves caught up in the “What’s in it for me?” mentality.

The brothers of Zebedee pulled Jesus aside requesting positions of influence in Jesus’ new order. One wanted to sit at Jesus’ right side, the other on his left.

They didn’t understand yet that the kingdom Jesus’ was proclaiming was one built on a foundation of selfless love, with bricks and mortar of sacrifice and suffering.

Are you willing to drink the cup I will drink? Or be baptized in the baptism I will be baptized in? Jesus’ questions of the brothers were referring to his death on the cross.

Jesus still asks the question today: Are we willing? Can we sacrifice our own gain or comfort for the betterment of others?

There once was a church which replaced the exit sign over the main door with one that read, “Servant’s Entry.” The congregation was perplexed until the pastor explained that when worship ended, they were all to exit the church building as servants now entering the world as the hands and feet of Christ.

*Loving God, may today we leave Your house of worship remembering that we are called to continue the work of our Suffering Servant — selflessly caring for all we encounter on our paths. Amen.*

Take Heart (10/27/2024) 23rd Sunday after Pentecost **GREEN**

Mark 10:46-52

Poor Bartimaeus. Blind and begging on the side of road just waiting for a kind soul to drop a coin or piece of bread into his wanting hands — perhaps even acknowledge his plight with an empathetic, “Take heart.”

But no one does.

Bartimaeus sits on what is most likely the infamous Jericho road, as Mark shares that Jesus was on the road leaving Jericho when he encounters the blind beggar.

It’s not a safe place to be. It is an 18-mile stretch of dirt, stone and danger. It was this throughway connecting Jerusalem and Jericho where a Good Samaritan tended to a traveler beaten and left for dead. Perhaps it is fitting for Bartimaeus to be there, as he himself has been left for dead as one of society’s forgotten ones.

Today, though, the Divine “take heart” speaks to Bartimaeus in the way of a growing commotion on the road. The shouts of the name “Jesus” reaches his ears. He knows the story of this man Jesus. He is the who makes the deaf hear and the crippled walk.

Could today be Bartimaeus’ turn to be made whole?

Jostled about, Bartimaeus adds to the ruckus, waving his arms and shouting, “Son of David, have mercy on me!”

Others sneer at the beggar, commanding him to be quiet. Their seeing eyes are blind to the fact that even Bartimaeus is worthy of Jesus’ healing mercies.

Bartimaeus shouts more loudly. Amid the many voices, Jesus hears that of the blind beggar, as his words are laced with faith. Bartimaeus is called out of the crowd and healed by Jesus.

The day will come, if it hasn’t already, where we will find ourselves like Bartimaeus, sitting alone on a road no one wants to be on. We will find ourselves sinking into a pit of despair over some crisis or challenge that we just can’t see a way out of.

But Bartimaeus whispers to us, “Take heart!” Never lose courage — even in the darkest night of the soul. Reach for Jesus. Cry out his holy name.

Don’t let a cynical world silence your cries. Don’t let your own doubts in the Faithful One mock that tiny mustard seed of faith you are desperately holding onto.

Be persistent. Be loud. Be like Bartimaeus. Shout with all your might, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” And wait for your miracle to begin.

*Gracious and Loving God, thank you for always being by our sides in our times of need. Continue to strengthen our voices so that our cries of help are loud and filled with faith. Help us to trust in Your mercies and remember that You are always making a way forward for us. Amen.*

### November 2024 Sunday Bulletins

Wherever You Go (11/3/2024) 24th Sunday after Pentecost **GREEN**

Ruth 1:1-18

The Book of Ruth has been heralded as a beautiful romance novella, where the main character — Ruth — displays courage and undying love amid great uncertainty and heartache.

Even before we begin reading, though, we get a sense of how this story unfolds, as Ruth’s name in Hebrew means “compassionate friend.” And that’s exactly what this young widow becomes to her mother-in-law, Naomi.

A great famine in the land of Moab led to deaths of their spouses, so Naomi prepares to return to Bethlehem. She tells Ruth and her other daughter-in-law, Orpah, to stay with their own people. Orpah does. Ruth doesn’t. Instead, she clings to Naomi. The word “cling” being the same word used in Deuteronomy that describes God’s steadfast embrace of the children of Israel.

Ruth then proclaims her love and devotion, saying, “Where you go, I go; your people shall be my people and your God, my God.”

Is it any wonder Ruth’s heartfelt words are often recited at weddings? You are not alone anymore. No longer are decisions made solely. We will navigate life’s detours together. Your people will be my people. Your God, my God.

Ruth is not only committing to her mother-in-law, but in doing so she is willingly relinquishing the beliefs that have shaped her identity. She is opening herself to all the new God possibilities that are being born out of adversity.

So often we cling to our beliefs and expect others to fall in line with them. Change, even compromise, are not favorite words in our vocabularies anymore. Yet what would happen if in our relationships we held loosely to our wants, needs and beliefs? What if we dared to allow room for God’s Spirit to open us to new customs, ideas, traditions — even a new way forward?

Ruth not only models for us the importance of being compassionate friends on the road of life, but she also shows us that nothing ever grows in the soil of comfort.

It is beyond our comfort zones where the blessings lie. Just ask Ruth. The Moabite widow never would have dreamt her faithful steps would lead to being part of God’s plan of salvation. And yet they did. Where are your steps leading you?

*God, thank you for Your steadfast love and companionship in our lives. May we cling to Your truth that while life brings many changes, Your great care for us changes not. We are never alone in this world. Amen.*

Risk and Restoration (11/10/2024) 25th Sunday after Pentecost **GREEN**

Ruth 3:1-5; 4:13-17

A seminary student was struggling to prepare a youth Bible study on how Ruth, a widowed Moabite gleaning fields in Bethlehem, cozies up one night to the owner of the land, Boaz, on the threshing room floor in the dark of night.

Yikes!

The pastor-in-training had no idea what to do with a text that seemed so racy for teens. And there lies the problem. Many times, ancient texts like this are read through modern lenses that sully a story pure with hope and redemption.

Ruth’s and Boaz’s story isn’t R-rated. It’s more H-rated. “H” for the Hebrew word “hesed,” which is defined as a love that is merciful, steadfast, loyal and charitable. It is a story of love that transcends the physical. It is a story of love that illustrates God’s love towards us.

When read through the lens of hesed, we see Boaz’s charitable love that permitted Ruth to glean his fields. We see the caring love of Naomi when she tells her daughter-in-law to wash and anoint herself and then present herself to Boaz.

This isn’t advice on how to snag a husband. Rather, the act of washing and anointing symbolized that the time of mourning was over. Out of love and concern, Naomi is telling Ruth it’s time to live again. It's time to think about securing a more sustainable future. Remember, widows in the ancient times were vulnerable. Marriage was viewed as security.

Ruth listens to her mother-in-law and goes to the granary at night to see Boaz, thus, putting her reputation on the line. The granary was a man’s place. Reputable women didn’t go there alone nor at night. There on the threshing room floor, Boaz, who is a kinsman of Naomi’s, gets past his initial shock of this young woman before him and looks upon her with eyes full of merciful love. Ruth’s risk was worth taking. They marry and have a son, Obed.

It's amazing to think what a love that is merciful, steadfast, loyal and charitable can do in our lives. It is awe-inspiring to see just how a risk-taking love led to not only the restoration of Ruth’s and Naomi’s lives, but the restoration of all humankind. For in the genealogical opening of the Gospel of Matthew, among all the “begots,” there is the name of Ruth and her son as the noteworthy ancestors of Jesus the Christ.

And that’s the Bible study the seminary student presented to the teens that day, as together they explored the story of Ruth, Naomi and Boaz, through the ancient lens of hesed — God’s powerful and restoring love.

*Merciful God, may today we be open to the transformative power of Your love — love that is charitable, kind, loyal and steadfast. May this love restore Your world. Amen.*

Praise the Holy One (11/17/2024) 26th Sunday after Pentecost **GREEN**

1 Samuel 1:4-20

*Are you weak and heavy laden, cumbered with a load of care, precious Savior still our refuge, take it to the Lord in prayer.*

Joseph M. Scriven knew what it was like to be cumbered with a load of care. Early on, Scriven had to drop out of military school due to poor health. Then, in 1844, on the eve of this wedding his fiancé drowned. After moving to Canada, Scriven found — and lost — love again. His fiancé died this time after a short illness.

Yet through it all, Scriven kept believing that there was a Heavenly Ear listening to his cries. In 1855, he expressed that belief in the ever-popular hymn, “What a Friend We Have in Jesus.”

Scriven’s reminder to take our sorrow-riddled sighs and desperation-filled whys to God is one we need today. We live in a time where we no longer know how to wait for anything — let alone God’s answer to prayer. We live in an on-demand society expecting God to be an on-demand God.

God, though, never forgets us. It might seem like God keeps us waiting in our sorrow, questions and trials, but God’s timing is not like ours. In the waiting, we need to draw closely to God and remain persistent with our prayers.

Hannah is the poster child for being persistent. Although her load of care — her infertility — was breaking her heart, she kept asking God to “open her womb.” Hannah’s husband, Elkanah, was kind to her, but Peninnah, the other wife, loved to flaunt her fertility in front of Hannah.

Years of societal shame, marital failure and personal grief, would have taken its toll on any person of faith. Hannah, though, kept praying.

In the end, Hannah’s prayers were heard. She conceived a son and, as promised, to show her praise to the Lord, she gives the child to the service of the priest, Eli.

What are the unanswered prayers you are carrying this day? How long have you been lifting them to God? Whatever you do, don’t stop praying. For you just can’t see how close you really are to receiving God’s answer.

*Dear God, grant us the persistence we need this day to keep on praying, knowing that You are not only listening but that You are working on the most beautiful answer to our deepest desires. Thank you for the answered prayers that we know will come — in your perfect timing. Amen.*

A Wise Reign (11/24/2024)

Reign of Christ | 27th Sunday after Pentecost

### GREEN

John 18:33-37

Today is Christ the King Sunday, a festival on church calendars that brings our attention once again to the why God sent his Son to us — to reign with righteousness, justice, peace and love.

It’s a day we hear Jesus in John’s Gospel telling Pilate, an earthly ruler, that the kingdom that Jesus has come to establish is not from here. It is beyond policies, agendas and elections. Perhaps that is why the use of the word “kin-dom” rather than “kingdom” is better suited for our time, as it emphasizes a reign where we are indeed kin, a family called to care for one another.

The celebration of Christ the King Sunday, though, is not an ancient church festival like Epiphany or Pentecost.

Christ the King Sunday was created by Pope Pius XI in 1925 to address the rise of communism and fascism that was taking place in Europe. He had envisioned his papacy to be “the reestablishment of the Kingdom of Christ by the peace of Christ,” and sought ways to lead people back to loving God first in a world that was being divided by politics.

Almost a century later, it is not hard to imagine the fears felt in the uncertain and volatile world of 1925. In many ways, they are the same. What will tomorrow bring for my family? Will my children be safe? When will the fighting end? Will there be jobs? Food? Housing?

Our world is still filled with power grabs and political loyalties that pit families, friends and congregations against one another. The Reign of Christ seems so distant. The reign of love so elusive. The reign of peace so impossible.

Yet here we are. Christ the King Sunday 2024. Where have we placed our trust for a hopeful tomorrow? If that trust is in the hands of mere mortals, we are in trouble. But if that trust is in God who reigns now and forever, then we just might have a chance in seeing peace in our lifetime.

In The Lord’s Prayer there’s a line recited that says, “thy kingdom come.” What if today we stop right there and ask ourselves what is this kingdom we are praying for? Have we given it any thought to what it really looks like? How is this kingdom asking us to change how we live — how we use your resources to help others?

Jesus’ kingdom is not from here. It is a kingdom foretold by the prophet Isaiah as one where the poor hear good news, the brokenhearted are comforted and prisoners are set free. It is a kingdom where all are welcome, and no one is without.

*God, You so loved the world that You gave us Your Son who is our Lord, Savior, Redeemer and King. May today we catch the vision of Christ’s reign here in our time, and may our words and deeds help to usher in thy kingdom. Amen.*