

**A Sermon from the Episcopal Parish of
St. John the Evangelist in Hingham, Massachusetts**

Preached by the Rev. Timothy E. Schenck on November 20, 2016 (Christ the King, Year C)

This past week, two Episcopal churches, one in Maryland and one in Indiana, were vandalized with racist messages. In Silver Spring, Maryland, parishioners at Church of Our Savior found “Trump nation — whites only” scrawled on a brick wall in their memorial garden. And the same words were written on the back of a banner advertising their weekly Spanish-language service. At St. David’s Church in Bean Blossom, Indiana, the phrases “fag church” and “heil Trump” were spray painted on the exterior, along with a swastika.

Now, it would be easy for us to ignore these incidents. I mean, they didn’t happen here in Hingham. *Our* sacred space wasn’t violated. *We* weren’t left to scrub hatred off our walls or wash contempt off our souls. In a sense, it doesn’t affect *us* at all.

But as the church, we are the Body of Christ. So when one of our members is wounded, we’re all wounded. When one of our members is diminished, we’re all diminished. When one of our members is demeaned, we’re all demeaned. And if we can’t share in the outrage of the denial of human dignity based solely upon race or sexual orientation, we need to question what exactly we think we’re doing sitting in a Christian church this morning; worshiping the Lord of love, the one who breaks down barriers between and among all people.

I’m not bringing this up to toss another log onto the the post-election fire that’s raging in our country. Hate transcends partisan politics. And there’s certainly no place for it in our world or in our church. But I think this moment in our national life serves as a clarion call to what we must do as a community of faith in divided times, as the hands and heart and voice of Jesus in the world. Because that’s precisely what and who we are.

Our call, as always, is to be a beacon of light that shines amid the darkness of a broken and sinful world. It is to stand with those on the margins of society, the weak and the vulnerable, the fearful and the dispossessed. It is to listen to the cries of those outside the traditional power structures, and to heed their voices. It is to embrace hope and the promise of Jesus’ resurrection, even in the face of darkness and despair. It is to tear down the walls between people who differ from us, politically, racially, culturally, and religiously. It is to make sacrifices, individually and communally, to insure social and economic justice for the poor and downtrodden.

These aren’t merely suggestions to consider, these are gospel mandates to live into. And it’s not easy. But then we worship a king who ushers us into a kingdom of radical transformation through divine encounter, not a life of leisure through a path of least resistance. On Christ the King Sunday we are reminded that we worship a king who is not of this world; a king whose very existence strikes fear into the hearts of the powers and principalities of the ruling class. A king of disruption and change rather than a monarch of structure and stability.

And so, we’re confronted with a challenging question: how will we claim our role as loyal subjects of Christ the King? In a world where might generally does make right, how do we follow the Prince of Peace?

Well, we can start by proclaiming our faith in ever-bolder ways. So that, in a sense, we should be asking ourselves, why didn’t this vandalism that touched the Church of Our Savior and St. David’s happen here at St. John’s? If we are preaching the gospel by word and action as a church community, if we are living out our baptismal vows to respect the dignity of every human being — not just *some* human beings or only the human beings who look like us and act like us and believe what we believe — we *should* be the target of vandalism. We *should* be reviled by the darker forces of this world, those who fight against love and justice and peace.

Do I want our sacred space to be vandalized? Of course not. But the gospel of Jesus Christ is not and never has been an easy path to follow. We worship a king, yes. But a king who was strung up on a cross to suffer and die, not one who prances around in royal robes. That's the great paradox of the Christian faith. That out of death there is life; out of darkness there is light; out of crucifixion there is resurrection. And that sacrifice is always involved in following the divine call to love your neighbor as yourself.

So, in order to be loyal subjects of Christ the King, what are we as a community willing to sacrifice? What privileges are we as individuals willing to sacrifice? These are the hard questions of being disciples of Jesus in an increasingly polarized world. It may be a sacrifice to give up your time to stand with the dispossessed. Or to share your financial resources — your hard-earned money — with the church and other charities that do kingdom work. It may be leaving your comfort zone to enter into hard conversations with those with whom you disagree or differ from in order to see life from another perspective.

These are the kinds of things that we as Christians must do now more than ever. We must proclaim as a church and as individuals that we will not stand for the demeaning of any human being for whatever reason. To stand idly by is to be complicit. It is to condemn Jesus to the cross again and again and again.

My friends in Christ, this is not an easy time to be a Christian. But it is an *important* time to be a Christian. We have such an opportunity to be a voice for the voiceless and to offer hope to the hopeless. Never has your commitment to this place mattered so much as it does in this very moment.

You know, I was in Arizona for a few days this week to attend a conference on church leadership. And one of the attendees was Kirk Smith, the Bishop of Arizona. I've met Bishop Smith several times over the years and we've interacted over social media, but he said something that startled me. At the end of the conference he shared some thoughts with the group and in reflecting on the church's role in the days, months, and years to come, he said. "I'm pretty sure I'm going to jail." This wasn't uttered as a badge of honor, there was great heartache in his words. But also deep conviction. "I'm pretty sure I'm going to jail because I'll be standing with the immigrants." This is precisely where the church needs to be, standing with the marginalized. Working for the kingdom of God always entails some suffering along the way. But in the saints of the church, we have plenty of powerful examples of perseverance and endurance we can always look to for inspiration, right along with a vision for bringing us ever closer to realizing God's kingdom here on earth.

I'm proud to engage in this struggle with all of you. Because of it, we will grow spiritually; our minds and hearts will be expanded; our comfort zones will be extended. We're not in this alone. Jesus, our royal brother, is with us at every step of the way. And there is great comfort, if not always solace, in this.

At St. David's in Bean Blossom, they left the hateful messages up in hopes of fostering dialogue. And at Church of Our Savior, in Silver Spring, the community pulled together the evening of the attack and packed the regular Spanish-language mass in a show of support and solidarity. Attendees wrote messages of love on the sidewalk in chalk and covered the vandalism with signs saying "love wins."

May we, like those seeking reconciliation, look to the courage of our convictions. And may we never, ever back down from following Christ our Lord and our King.