

“An Invitation to a Feast”  
Colossians 1:11-20 and John 6:25-35  
Feast of Christ the King and Thanksgiving Sunday  
November 20, 2016  
Wauwatosa Avenue United Methodist Church

This is one of those weeks where we are doing at least double duty. It is the Sunday before Thanksgiving and it is the final Sunday of the liturgical year, the Feast of Christ the King. We have the elegant Gospel lesson in which Jesus says, “I am the bread of life...” Oftentimes, I begin the sermon with a joke or funny story to capture your attention. Usually, I Google the subject and the word “jokes” – for example, bread jokes. That brought up many options for bread and baker’s jokes. Half of them were just plain dumb and the other half were off color or downright dirty. Suffice it to say, no jokes or stories this morning.

The Feast of Christ the King is a fairly late arrival on the scene. It was originally instituted by Pope Pius XI in 1925. In 1970, Pope Paul VI moved it to the last Sunday of the liturgical year so that we begin the liturgical year with Advent and preparing for the coming of the Christ and end with the kingship, lordship, or reign of Christ. What does it mean that Christ is King? It means that, ultimately, Jesus is the center of our lives around which everything turns.

In Colossians, we are reminded that through Jesus we have redemption and the forgiveness of sin. These are things that we cannot do for ourselves. We are also told something that will be important to us as we move into the Advent season next week. “For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.” Jesus is God in human form.

For this, we give thanks. This season of the year is my favorite. It is easy to give thanks in the fall of the year. The temperatures drop as we see the spectacular nature show of leaves turning. Yesterday morning, as I was walking the dog it was snowing. It was the good kind of snow that came lightly and the temperature allowed for the wearing of a fall jacket. I know that the below zero temperatures are coming, but for now, I can convince myself that this is all the worse it will get and there is a spring in my step.

One of my personal traditions around the Thanksgiving season is to watch the video *Babette’s Feast*. There was a time when *The Wizard of Oz* was on TV every year, and that was a tradition. Now it is *Babette’s Feast*. If you have never seen it, it is a great flick. It is about two daughters of a Danish, conservative pastor. The daughters are named Martina, after Martin Luther, and Phillipa, after Phillip Melancton, Martin Luther’s friend and follower. After the old man dies, they carry on the traditions. Both

have men who fall for them, but are pushed aside. One of the men asks them to take in a woman who must flee Paris during the Revolution. She becomes a domestic and immediately ingratiates herself to the community as she helps the sisters in their good works. The small religious community goes through rough times as they gossip about one another and treat each other badly. Babette, the domestic, wins the French lottery and asks to make the commemorative dinner in honor of the father's 100<sup>th</sup> birthday. The people see the food coming in: live quail, a live turtle, and many different types of wine. They are sure that this is a feast for the devil. Because of their love for Babette, they decide to partake, but not to enjoy. There is much backbiting at the beginning of the meal. By the time the meal is finished, all are happy and enjoying themselves. Babette changed that community through a meal. The sisters were sure she would leave once the meal was done, but it turned out that she spent all 10,000 francs that she won to provide this gift to the community. Her act of total self-giving changed that community.

Today's gospel has several somewhat hidden images in it. First of all, it is one of several "I am" statements found in John's gospel. If you remember back to Genesis and Moses meeting God in the burning bush, Moses asked God's name and was told, "My name is, I AM." Each of these "I Am" statements would have been shocking to the people. Jesus is equating himself with the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. That is who Jesus is as the incarnate God. Secondly, by claiming himself as "bread", he claims himself as a staple for life. When people get together for a meal, we say that they break bread together. One can live for a long time on bread and water. There is also the memory, for the Jewish people, of the bread from heaven, the manna given in the wilderness.

On Thursday, families and friends will come together and there will be a lot more than mere bread shared. We will celebrate by eating more than we ever eat in a given day. We will have turkey and all the fixings. At Pastor Domnik's home, there will be a traditional American Thanksgiving, but Joyce is giving a nod to Domnik's heritage by providing an Indian masala sauce to be used as a gravy. We have many traditions new and old. I, personally, love turkey, and make a huge one for myself. I will be making a 22-pound bird. If anyone has no place to go, call me and come join me. I always stay home and make a big bird because it is all about the leftovers, but I'm more than willing to share.

Thanksgiving is that time when we remind ourselves that we have been blessed. We do not just stop with the staples of life, like bread. We have a sumptuous feast with turkey and dressing, ending with the obligatory pumpkin pie. We remember that, while we have been blessed with so much, there are others who do not have food on their tables. Rescue missions, churches, and other places that care for the poor will be providing meals on Thursday for those who struggle to get by. We remember that we have an obligation to care for those who do not have enough – not just on Thanksgiving Day, but throughout the year.

This week marks the beginning of a season of plenty for most of us. As I walked my dog last evening, I saw Christmas trees already lit in many homes. Christmas wreaths are already starting to adorn the outside of peoples' homes. Today, we have the opportunity here at Tosa Avenue Church for Alternative Giving, in which our gifts to friends and family take the form of helping others both here and abroad. Our youth are selling pies to fund a mission trip to work on the homes of people who cannot do the required repairs on their own. Yesterday, we made peanut butter and jelly sandwiches for food insecure people in our own city. Two of our members met with others in our circuit to begin conversation about ways in which we can reach out to our community.

Jesus is truly our king and we declare our gratitude for what we have been given. Just like Abraham, we have been blessed to be a blessing to others. We have a call and an obligation to care for "the least of these." At this time of year, we focus on our blessings and our giving, but it is something that is, for us, a year-round way of being. You have been called to be a disciple and to call others to discipleship. That, too, is God's gift to you.