

“Do We Sing - or SERVE the King?”

Through the years I have often said to people: “There is only ONE Church.....because there is only ONE Christ.” We speak of “denominations,” but there is really only ONE Church.

This morning..... I’d like us to look at the ONE KING ! We hear of a “king” here or a “king” there.....or a “queen” here or there ! but for us Christians there is, in truth, only one King - the ultimate Ruler, the Messiah !

I’d like us to hear some of the words of the hymns you’ve been singing in the holy season of Christmas. You and I, every year repeatedly use the word “King” when we are referring to the Christ Child...in the manger: the long-awaited Messiah !

I ask you to pay close attention.....here we go.....

“Lift Up Your Heads, Ye Mighty Gates”: “ Behold, the King of Glory waits; The King of Kings is drawing near; The Saviour of the world is here.”

“Come, Thou Long –expected Jesus”: “Born to set Thy people free; Born a child and yet a King.”

“Angels, from the realms of Glory”: “Come and worship, come and worship, Worship Christ , the new-born King”

“Angels We Have Heard on High”: “ Come to Bethlehem and see.....Come, adore on bended knee Christ, the Lord, the new-born King.”

“What Child is This?”: “ What child IS this?? Who laid to rest, On Mary’s lap is sleeping? So bring Him incense, gold, and myrrth. Come, peasant, king (small “k”!) to own Him . The King of Kings salvation brings, Let loving hearts enthrone Him..... This, THIS is Christ the King !”

“HARK ! the Herald Angels Sing. Glory to the new-born King !

“O Little Town of Bethlehem” - Phillips Brooks, preacher in Philadelphia and Boston..... “And praises sing to God the King, And peace to men on earth.”

Isaac Watts - 1719 - “Joy to the World!” “Let earth receive her King. He rules the world with truth and grace, And makes the nations prove The glories of His righteousness, AND WONDERS OF HIS LOVE.”

Do we Christians REALLY pay attention to what we proclaim in our singing ??

The Old Testament of the Hebrews tells the world: (Isaiah 44:6)

“This is what the Lord says - Israel’s King and Redeemer, the Lord Almighty:

I am the first and the last; apart from me there is no God.”

The New Testament gospel of the physician Luke (1:26 ff) has the Angel Gabriel proclaiming to a young girl named Mary: “You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.”

This is the KING we sing about, all the time, every year, day in and day out.

But: do we Christians take it any further? Do we proclaim - to the world -- this KING ? Do we worship Him on Sunday in comfortable pews, or even uncomfortable pews !.....and stop there ?! Keep this news mainly to ourselves? ?

You and I and most of the world's people are living in difficult, scary times. I am going to suggest to you this morning....as a Christian congregation living in Americathat we need to go beyond the singing ! WE are not waiting for the Messiah – He has come ! All of the followers of this Messiah, this King, this King of Kings, need to take our religion more seriously....AND express it more openly.

I hear REAL threats of terrorism more and more. I hear an old lady say “ the world is violent.” I hear our President say, “they were vicious acts in France;” and “we need a ‘summit’ on violence.” I hear the Prime Minister of Great Britain speak and say “the threat we face is severe;” and - “we need great discipline in this struggle.” President Obama: “Poisonous ideology, pulling the youth of our world in.” And, the beheading of fellow human beings. May we not be naive to think it is only far way. I hear on my television night after night that a young woman - 21 – not far from here was murdered – this month – simply because a youth - two youths – “just wanted to kill someone.” And, adults doing the same. Listen to the distressed father of the Ohio young man who wanted to attack our Unites States Capital and kill our senators. Children of God are being killed in our times, like they are flies ! Children in Connecticut simply going to school. Did you or I have to worry about being killed when we walked in an elementary school, our high school or college ?

We hear about the faith of Islam; and we hear how thousands are perverting this Faith. We hear how people are losing their lives simply because they profess they are Jews or Moslems or Christians. Mr. Huckabee suggests we do not have a crisis of economics; we have a crisis of Faith.

Jesus gave us the Great Commission: Matthew 28: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to ME. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit’ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age.”

I am not going to suggest this morning that we all must become missionaries in foreign lands. I believe it is far more basic than this. I believe that in this world of "violence, terrorism, EVIL" you and I and the rest of the professed believers in Jesus the Messiah, the appointed King, must vocalize our beliefs - and the gift of salvation to the troubled world we are living in. It is not enough for us to "come and worship the newborn King." It is not enough for you and me to keep God's eternal gift of forgiveness and salvation to ourselves - or within the Holy Church!

The WORLD is hearing about Islam, the world is hearing about Judaism. The people of this world need to hear about the Christ Child, the King of Kings, the one whose Kingdom is to have no end.

But first we -all professed Christians -need to do our homework ! How many Christmas cards do you receive from very "good" people who really do not practice much of the Christmas religion ?? We receive many each year. One we received this year: Big Letters, says "Merry Christmas" -has the lovely couple on the front....wonderful people and dear friends..... a wife in her fifties, who said in a discussion we were having a couple of years ago in her mother's living room....."I didn't know there was an Old and New Testament !!" We need to reach these "border Christians." Thousands, millions of them..... including youth!

I believe in this world of so much violence and evil that you and I and our children are living in.....that we need to go back to the basics....and study and discuss:

"What does it MEAN to be a Christian?" Jesus said, "Follow me and I will make you." I'm not speaking about what makes a good elder, or deacon, or pastor, or missionary; I'm speaking about "what makes a Christian." We, all over the land, need to discuss this, and then be more vocal. We hear about the ways of terrorism. The world needs to hear - from each of us - from all of us - the ways of the King, the only true King, Jesus the Christ.

If we do not reach out and share our Christian Faith, terrorism is going to win !! It's on its way. The silent majority needs to tell the OTHER side of EVIL. OR, we should not complain about the EVIL we are witnessing more each day.

And worse than this, our children, our grandchildren, and those millions of children of God, the Creator, who follow – are going to live in a more violent, EVIL world than we are experiencing. How do you EXPLAIN to a child some of the evil sights we are seeing on the television?

Christianity was not meant to be a religion of convenience; it was meant to be the ANSWER for humankind. Our Lord, the King of Kings, is calling you and me, and many, many others to be His Voice !

When I was a student at Princeton Theological Seminary - in the late 60's – I use to walk to the seminary library - very often! As I came close, I could look up and read: Robert E. Speer Library. A Library that was dedicated in 1957. When in the spring of 1970 I somehow "landed" in Huntingdon County; McAlevy's Fort and Petersburg-Bethel Presbyterian churches - it did not take long for me to learn that Robert Speer, a Presbyterian layman, a missionary, a real spokesman for the King of Kings, the MESSIAH ! grew up on Penn Street in Huntingdon, Pennsylvania. What a wonderful example of " what is really involved in being a true Christian."

"Thy Kingdom come, THY Will be done." Terrorism, EVIL, loss of basic respect for human life is not God's Will. Why did I hear a commentator on our TV, speak these words: "These are unprecedented times."? Hundreds and thousands are being killed around the globe. Why did I hear another say "We are in a new chapter of terrorism." Maybe we've seen violence before on a world scale—WW 1, WW 2 – but God's creation does not need to see it again ! When Rev. Ben Weir, kidnaped by terrorists in Lebanon in 1984, came to Huntingdon Presbytery

to speak about terrorism, did he not speak from THIS pulpit?? 30 years ago. Would we agree that things are much worse??

If the majority of Christians stay sleeping, terrorism is on its way to conquer. The governments, the military, the police, can try to do their part, BUT they do not have the ultimate answer. The King of Kings, the Messiah has the answer.

The issue is whether terrorism, violence and EVIL will reign, or God's Kingdom will reign. And the followers of the Messiah hold the answer! Will we care enough to share it?? Will Christians become more vocal...or will we be satisfied to enter our sanctuaries and simply "WORSHIP the new-born King" ?

Dietrich Bonhoeffer suggested, we don't need to ask how we can be "good."

We need to ask, "What is the will of God?" Who was Dietrich Bonhoeffer?? He was a German pastor who gave up his life – to the evil Nazis – because he took his Christianity seriously. He wrote The Cost of Discipleship. What does Christian discipleship mean in these present days?? We need to invite others into our presence...so we can discuss and grow.

God, I believe, is calling us –Christians – his followers – to study, to discuss, to VERBALIZE our professed Faith!

No easy task !! However, Jesus said to his disciples: "Lo, I am with you always !" I believe there is a particular Call to the King's disciples in this Hour. The world, near and far, needs to hear the message of the King of Kings from the everyday Christian - you and me !!

The King of Kings ---who is far above the numerous "kings" of terrorism and EVIL has made it clear: "I am the Way, the Truth, and the LIFE." Is THIS message being heard as widely and as loud as the message of TERROR ???

For Jesus' Sake. And for all God's creation. AMEN.

2014- Elaine Peck Africa