

---

## *The Ultimate Reality Check*

**A sermon by Canon Cathy Zappa**  
**Last Sunday after Pentecost – Year B**

Today's the last Sunday of the church year—a Sunday that commonly celebrates “Christ the King,” or, for those who object to “king” language, the “reign of Christ.” On this Sunday, before we begin again with Advent next week, we take in all we've witnessed through the liturgical year, from Christ's birth, to his life, death, resurrection, and ascension. And, in light of all this, we confess that Christ *is* the king of kings—that Christ's reign is already here, even as it's still to come in all its glory.

But, given the state of our world today, we may feel like this is a Sunday proclamation only—that we can only sing “Christ is King” when we're in this building, but don't dare to believe it outside of here. It may seem like this claim begs us to ignore the harsh realities of the world and enter into some fairy-tale land: a land with no terrorism, no crime, no executions, no poverty or racism or refugee crisis. A world where there is no fear, or hate. In other words, a world that doesn't exist.

Because how on earth can we reconcile this world with Christ's reign of peace? Because if Christ were really king, if he really had that kind of power, wouldn't he put an end to all this violence and pain?

At the root of this dissonance, of course, is our expectation of power. *Power*, we assume, gets what it wants, whether by force or persuasion. Power makes secure. Power controls. Power instills respect—or fear. Power, we assume, is power *over*: power over others, friend and foe alike. Power over circumstance. Power over nature, mortality, weakness. And if you want to know what we've granted power over us, pay attention to what we fear.

That's the kind of power that terrorism is after: it seeks to build up power *over* others, through fear, in order to provoke, intimidate, and control. And the fear it conjures stretches well beyond the people most directly affected by its violence. Last week, when I realized my children were really scared by attacks thousands of miles away, I came across a website by Kids Health about talking about terrorism with kids.

It offered one of the simplest definitions I've seen: “Terrorism is something very violent that is meant to hurt and scare many people. When a terrorist strikes,” it says, “it seems like the entire world is upside down and confusing.” That's what we're dealing with now, isn't it? We're hurt and scared. Our world has been turned upside down, and we're confused.

And what do we tend to do when we're scared? Well, a lot of things. We hoard. We hide. We retreat into places and spaces where we imagine we're safe. We put extra locks on our doors and close our borders. We close ourselves off to strangers—maybe even to life itself. *Or* we decide to go on the offensive, striking first, or at least striking back, as a way to reassert control and power—and to protest our vulnerability.

But this is to submit to the terrorizing powers of the world and let them determine our behavior. This is to take the powers of the world to be ultimate, and to believe their claim to have power over us, and power over life and death.

That same website gives some practical advice about addressing the fear that terrorism evokes. First on its list is this: “Give yourself a reality check.” The reality, the site explains, is “The chances that a terrorist will hurt you are very, very small.”

But as a Christian, I interpret this differently: God is our reality check. God is the ultimate reality. The God we know *in*

*Christ* is the ultimate reality. The beginning and the end. The Almighty, who is, and who was, and who is to come, and will have the final word.

These words come, of course, from Revelation, which is addressed to Christians being terrorized by the Roman Empire, an empire that claims power *over* them and manages them, as empires often do, with violence. It addresses a people who are scared. Who are struggling to reconcile their experience of persecution and violence with their faith in the God of justice and peace.

And what does Revelation tell them? It doesn't tell them to fight, or to flee. No, it tells them to recognize the reality that transcends—and transforms—the fearful and hateful powers of the world. "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God." Even amid the terrors you are facing, I am. Christ is.

Christ *is* the king whose power transcends and transforms all others. Christ is the king who redefines power altogether, by entering Jerusalem on a donkey, washing his followers' feet, eating with sinners and outcasts, choosing to suffer rather than to inflict suffering. Christ is the king who gives himself and his power away, to free us for new life and reconciliation.

In Jesus Christ, God has already come to dwell among us; God has already delivered and reconciled us. Yes, *already*. This is no flight from reality. This is what is really real. This is the reality that checks all other realities. This is the reality that determines the whole of life for us.

The question is, will we trust in this ultimate reality? Will we give up fear of the powers in this world, and recognize Christ as the ruler of all the kings and powers on earth? Will we live in the way Christ shows us—the way that breaks the cycle of violence and liberates us from hate?

It's hard to do, of course; and it requires a lot of faith and courage. But it makes all the difference. Because it's through trusting in this reality and choosing, by grace, to live under the reign of Christ already, that we realize Christ's sovereignty in our lives today—and that the world as we know it is transformed before our very eyes—that hate and fear begin to give way to love and faith.

"So it is to be. Amen."