Certain Sundays on the church calendar work as something like divine housekeeping, tidying up our understanding of God so we can move to the next step. One such Sunday is Trinity Sunday where, after the introduction of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, we acknowledge the fact that we now have all the ingredients needed for the Trinity and can move on to the next liturgical season. Today is another such case. It is known as Christ the King Sunday and is also the end of the Church year. Roughly outlined the Church Year starts in Advent with preparing for the arrival of Jesus, proceeds to His actual arrival on Christmas, goes through His death and resurrection in Easter, progresses to the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost and then moves to twenty-five weeks or so of reflecting on that reality before we wrap everything up today and talk about where it all ends. And it all ends, as we say in the Nicene Creed, with Christ coming “again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.” And while today is a tidying up Sunday, do not be put off by that. For as my wonderful wife will tell you there is no greater thing one can do in life than tidy up.

I don’t think there is much of a need to talk at length about the coming of Christ’s Kingdom at least not in terms of how and when and all that. The reason I say that we should not worry about the logistics of the event is because all we really need to know is that it will happen one day and that we should be ready for it. And we will be ready, not by spending time sweating the details, trying to predict the time and the way the event is going to go down but we will be ready by delighting in His will and walking in His ways. As you have probably heard me say my only prediction is that when it happens it will be on a Tuesday and done in good taste. We should spend time reflecting on when Christ comes again what kind of kingdom will He establish so that we may be prepared. Which of course raises the question: What will Christ’s Kingdom look like?

To establish what we are talking about let’s start by getting a working definition of kingdom. According to my painstaking research involving putting the word kingdom into Google I learned that a kingdom is, “a realm associated with or regarded as being under the control of a particular person or thing.” Put another way, when we think of a kingdom and the way it looks it reflects the will of one individual. On earth this is usually a bad thing where you end up with misery, economic privation and leaders with bad perms like you had in North Korea under Kim Jong Il. The fault in earthly kingdoms is whose will they follow, which in our case means human will and as you know we humans have a less than a stellar track record on pretty much everything. But when we are talking about Christ’s kingdom, we are talking about someone at the helm who has a perfect will who will, meaning we will not have to worry about things like Winnie the Pooh being banned as he is in China. As to the specifics of Christ’s Kingdom, besides knowing that it will not be lousy, we are given something of a description in today’s Gospel.

The description is interesting because in many ways it is not about how the kingdom will look and function but is rather about what the people who inhabit it will look like – not superficially but in terms of their essence. I will not read the whole description but here is a snippet. Jesus says, “Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.” He later clarifies why he is saying that these things were done to him stating, “I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.” The kingdom is described then as a place where people look out for one another. Everyone takes it upon themselves to make sure that others in the community have what they need – food, clothing, companionship and so on. And that sounds rather lovely, like a place where we would like to live. But, as per usual there is a catch. Since we are human, we often take verses like this and use them not as a way to examine ourselves and see how we are doing in terms of the criteria that Jesus lays out but rather as a way to judge others. It has become fashionable in certain parts of Christendom to accuse others of not really being sufficiently Christian because they are not adequately devoted to caring for the sick, feeding the hungry and so on. To be honest these accusations are usually caught up in politics and as we all know politics has a way of corrupting everything that it touches. And I bring this up not to bore you with politics but as a reminder that that what Jesus says today is not about other people but is rather about us.

When we think about Christ the King and the sort of kingdom it will be, the question is not whose in and whose out. Rather the question should be are we doing what we should so that we will fit into that kingdom. Will our actions and mental state be such that we look like we belong? Do we look to serve others or to be served? In some ways we can think that in the coming Christ’s kingdom we have a choice to make. Do we want to live in such a way that makes us ready for that kingdom or do we want to be in the thralls of this earthly kingdom and be enamored with things like pride, selfishness, and envy. C.S. Lewis said, “All that are in Hell, choose it. Without that self-choice there could be no Hell.” On the flip side of that are those who are in Christ’s Kingdom – they have willingly chosen it. Now before I go on, I need to address the crypto Lutherans in the congregation who will be uncomfortable with this idea of choosing Christ’s Kingdom because it sounds dangerously close to works righteousness, where we earn our way into heaven. To that I say settle down. It is not about earning because obviously none of us our worthy of any of the gifts that God has given to us rather it is about living in such a way that shows we truly want to follow Christ. And to do that we must follow the example of Christ. Christian after all means little Christ. And the Gospels are filled with examples of what God’s kingdom looks like. In Mark Jesus says, “If any one would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all.” Matthew’s Gospel is full of things to which Jesus compares the Kingdom of Heaven – an employer of laborers, mustard seeds, leaven and so on. But there is one thing he adds in his description of the Kingdom of Heaven when He talks about it being like a pearl of great value. This addition almost seems out of place for it deals with the reaction of the one who discovers this pearl. Jesus says, the individual, “who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it.” Everything in this individual’s life became secondary to the Kingdom of God. That is how we are to pursue it. We know how we need to be and so we are to drop everything and plunge headlong into this Heavenly Kingdom so that we may be God’s own this day and forevermore.