

# Thursday Theology: In-Between-Time Thoughts about Christ as King

Co-missioners,

Our editor chips in again this week. Two reminders before he lets the chips fly:

First, registration is open for the Crossings seminar at the end of January. Scholarship help is available if needed. Don't hesitate to ask. The topic: "Delivering God's Goods." Speakers include Fred Niedner, Robin Lutjohann, Nathan Hall, Chris Repp; Ruth Hanusa preaching at the Eucharist. Do join us! [Click here for details](#).

Second, next February brings the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the day when Christ Seminary–Seminex was launched. Crossings is marking the occasion with the publication of *Seminex Remembered* by Edward H. Schroeder, available as a gift to any and all who either participated in the Seminex story or would like to learn about it. It will be released in mid-December. To pre-order a copy for yourself or, perhaps, for someone on your Christmas list, [use this link](#).

Peace and Joy. So said Ed every time he signed off on one of his seven hundred Thursday Theology posts. We say it too—

Peace and Joy,  
The Crossings Community

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# **In-Between-Time Thoughts about Christ as King**

by Jerome Burce

The final hurrah of the current church year is suddenly in the rear-view mirror. A new year dawns this coming Sunday, the First of Advent. Those of us who pay attention to the rhythms of the church calendar are likely feeling somewhat odd today. To use a spatial analogy, it's like traveling the brief stretch of road between the west gate of the Ohio Turnpike and the east gate of the Indiana Toll Road. I've done this fairly often of late, living as I do in northeast Ohio with children in Chicago and a father in Wisconsin. Thoughts and feelings during those few miles are always jumbled. What lies behind sparks relief over progress thus far. What lies ahead prompts a mix of anticipation and annoyance, Chicago being an exciting place to reach and Indiana's section of Interstate 90 a dull way of getting there.

So too with thoughts and feelings during this week's passage between the years. Mine are jumbled. Here are a few of them—



*Melkite-Christ-the-King*

[From Wikimedia Commons](#)

## **Christ is King. “Yes!”**

The old year wrapped up this past Sunday with the usual focus on Christ as King—the Reign of Christ, as many prefer to say these days. It being Year A in the Revised Common Lectionary, the appointed Gospel was the tough text from Matthew 25 about the separating of sheep and goats. I heard a good sermon anyway—surprisingly good. The preacher refused to let us imagine Christ as the Regal Bookkeeper who keeps a running count of our deeds, whether sheeply or goatish, final tallies to be announced on Judgment Day. “Face it,” he said. “I’m a goat. You’re a goat. Our behavior proved as much these past twelve months. Yes, you did some kind and thoughtful things. Still, how many sick and hungry people did we all ignore along the way? Next question: what did the Teller of this story do for goats like us? And why was he raised from the death he died if not to turn us into

sheep—his sheep? Isn't that what he's doing with power and authority this very morning, right here in this place? So off you go with heads held high. Serve this King of yours with joy and hope and confidence this week."

With this in my ears, away I went, thanking God once again that Christ is in charge as others are not. I hope my companions in that little congregation did the same. This depends, of course, on whether their own ears were able to catch what was said. More on this in another post. Meanwhile, kudos to the Crossings text study writer whom the preacher paused to quote as he talked to us. This small yet huge surprise left me glad that our work at Crossings is still ongoing. Dare we hope that others will catch the bug of promising Gospel this year? Let's certainly pray for it as we hit the new year this coming Sunday. "Infect us, gracious Lord. Make us infectious!"

### **"Christ-is-King." A Caveat**

A recent seminary graduate told me last week that the worship instructors at his ELCA school were in favor of taking a pass on Christ the King Sunday. To them it smacked too much of authoritarian power issues or something equally unsavory. Male privilege, perhaps. I responded that these issues have got to be faced. They're with us always, to the close of the age. We have no choice except to be ruled by someone or something. The question is who, or what? Here the contenders are legion. Devilishly so. Anyone with their wits together at the end of 2023 will be wondering with fear and trembling how soon AI will take charge of our lives and control our children's futures. Against such fears stands the promise that throbbed in this past Sunday's reading from Ephesians 1. Christ Crucified is today's Ruler of Rulers. Top Dog, to put it casually. He always will be. He can't be overthrown. What makes him so magnificent is the way he rules—with mercy, compassion, forgiveness, love. He neither

snarls nor bites and yet has everything it takes to undo evil and make things right for everyone, beginning at the bottom with the lost, the least. So really, I said, what's *not* to celebrate here? Let's say it with joy: Christ is King.

A day or two later I read about a recent spat in an X (formerly Twitter) corner of the hard right. It involved some yahoos using the phrase "Christ is King" to taunt a Jewish member of the group whose fidelity to their cause had been deemed insufficient. I thought immediately of crosses being carried in the vanguard of the assault on the Capitol building on January 6, 2021. I ground my teeth again over the way the devil spoils everything. He-she-it turns Good News into Bad News. So it was in the garden: "Did God *really* say...?" So it was and is and always will be in this old and current age when the devil romps uncaged. Of all God's things, said devil's primary target is God's Best-Thing-Ever in Christ Jesus. When has the Gospel *not* been distorted, Christ cast as a tyrant, his cross used as a weapon? This past year of our Lord was rife with such nonsense. The year to come will stink with it too, much of the stench emanating directly from places that mock the word "church" by applying it to themselves. One finds such places on both sides of the ecclesiastical spectrum, left as well as right. The giveaway is the acrid bite of all the ought-to's/got-to's/have-to's that are hovering in the air with the extra kick of a sharp or-else. "Do it our way, think it our way, feel it our way—or else to hell with you!"

Here it bears remembering that the genuine Christ's kingly move with the disagreeable was to get enthroned on a cross for their sake—to love them to his own death as St. John underscores. To live with Christ today is to join him in this love that dies for the yahoos. My inner rebel shrinks from this prospect. It always has. It will this year. Still, there it is, a thing to face as we hurtle into Advent. Another year in the astonishingly

gracious regime of the only king worthy of the title: the one who went to hell himself and drags me in his wake to rescue other fools who belong there. (My thanks to Fred Niedner for sparking this last thought.)



*From Canva*

## **Out-Kinging the World's Kings**

This brings me to some other thoughts—not mine, but Ed Schroeder's—about the vocation of the baptized in this or any other year. I rummaged in our Crossings library a while back and found a pair of lectures that Ed delivered at Valparaiso University in 1984. They're entitled "Luther and the Liberation of the Laity." Part One addresses "[The Liberation They Enjoy](#)." Part Two is about "[The Freedom They Employ](#)." The "they" of both sub-titles refers, of course, to the laity—the "merely baptized," as Ed says with a cheeky poke at clerics who take

themselves too seriously and a cheery boost for layfolk who hesitate to take themselves seriously enough.

Be you clerical or lay, I urge to read these this week. For embedded links, see above. While not the best of Ed's work, they're even so a great way to make the transition from a celebration of Christ the King to an Advent overview of God's intentions for the creation Christ rules. More to the point, Ed addresses the role we get to play in the unfolding of these intentions over the next twelve months. He does this by channeling Luther's reading of 1<sup>st</sup> Peter. The upshot: take yourselves more seriously and with greater cheerfulness than you've dared to in the past. Here's how Ed puts it in his outline for the first lecture:

"The liberation of the (merely?) baptized means:

- **appropriating the biography of Jesus as the Christ into one's own biography,**
- **and thus moving toward an upbeat future with two passports in hand**
- **for out-kinging the world's kings and out- priesting her worldly priests."**

I love that line: "out-kinging the world's kings." It's not merely our job. It's what we *get* to do—what God in Christ has set us loose to do in 2024. There is wonderful material here for a study session at your church this year with 1 Peter as the topic. So much the better if a group of lay-folk can work through it with a theologian in the corner for some advice as they need it.

Bottom line: Heads up. Backs straight. Flash your regal credentials. Bless the world the King has dropped you into as the coming year goes by.

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Roaming Shores, Ohio

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**Thursday Theology: that the benefits of Christ be put to use**

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