Every Sunday, generation after generation, we gather here in this sacred place to tell the ancient story of the people of God and how, generation after generation, against all odds, they survive every hardship, every storm, every fire, every disaster, every calamity.

We tell the story of how, against all odds, generation after generation, the people of God arrive in the promised lands of hope and healing, new life and salvation.

By gathering here, Sunday after Sunday, generation after generation, we make this story of hope and healing, life and salvation, our story, too.

We tell this epic story of reaching the promised lands from the books of the Bible, but we also tell this story in through hymns and art, stained glass windows, in the words of our prayers, and in the way we live.

We even tell this story of through the changing seasons and the colors of the seasons.

Today we mark the end of what the Church calls “Ordinary Time,” this long expanse of days that goes from the final Sunday of Easter, and stretches through spring, summer and fall.

Traditionally, the church marks “ordinary time” by adorning our worship space with green, and the clergy wear green vestments.

Next Sunday we have a change of seasons and change of colors. We enter the season of Advent, the season of expectation as we remember the time of waiting before Jesus Christ is born.

We will be adorning our worship space with blue, and the clergy will be wearing blue vestments, the color of the sky just before the dawn, and the traditional color of Mary, the mother of Jesus.

Contrary to the consumer culture around us, the Christmas season does not begin at Thanksgiving – or Halloween.

Here in the church, we wait a little longer. Before we get to Christmas, we dwell in Advent.

But before we get to Advent, the Church calendar gives us one more reminder today of the point of all this: The new life promised to all of us in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The Church calls this last Sunday before Advent “Christ the King Sunday.” We declare Jesus king-of-kings, and Lord-of-Lords.
Over the centuries the Church, in words and art, has portrayed Jesus Christ as triumphant monarch, and adorning him in regal robes, with scepter in hand, making this Jewish peasant look like a Medival king.

But today confronts us with an awkward question: If Jesus is this all-powerful king-of-kings, royal of royals, what is he doing on the Cross? What kind of king is this, stripped of his clothing and dignity?

Many churches have taken to calling this “Reign of God Sunday,” but that takes Jesus out of the equation and side steps the question: How is that he is king of kings?

I would suggest to you the answer is at the foot of the Cross with these two criminals hanging on either side of Jesus.

One of them speaks from the heart, from an inner place that was lost to him until this moment.

“Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”

And Jesus tells him he is already there. “Today you will be with me.”

The meaning everything Jesus teaches and does – the parables, the miracles, the healings, the Resurrection itself – are in this moment with Jesus. Today you are with me. You are always with me.

This king is defined by being with the lowly, the tortured, and those needing forgiveness and healing, and everyone who hangs on a cross at some point in their life.

He goes to the Cross and to Hell itself to bring us out of these terrible places, and restore us to the promised land of hope and healing, new life and salvation.

This king has nothing to do with our conventional human concepts of politics and power, greed and possessions, prestige and status.

This king turns all of those human values upside down.

This is not a king in regal robes, scepter in hand, hovering above us. This king defines his kingship by the exact opposite.

Jesus defines his kingship by walking with us when we are feeling lost, when we have doubts, when we believe in nothing at all.

But make no mistake: By following this king, we are being challenged to shift from a kingdom that values conflict, to a kingdom that values kindness.

We are challenged to shift from a kingdom that values self-interest, to a kingdom that sees everyone as children of God – and challenged to act like it.

This king challenges us to shift from a kingdom that grabs for all it can get, to a kingdom that shares generously.
And this king we profess to follow challenges us to live beyond what we think is possible.

Jesus did not drop out of the world, but took the harder path of immersing himself deeply in the world.

He lived wherever people took him in, and sometimes no one took him in. He lived in the desert or on the street.

He taught, he healed, and he worked with his hands. He enjoyed a good meal, and he could spin a good yarn and tell jokes.

But he also could be quite harsh with his followers. He did not shy away from telling them the gritty realities of the world — and the commitment it takes to be one of his followers:

Feed the hungry in body, mind and soul. Heal the sick, turn the other cheek, share your possessions with the poor and needy.

Commit yourself to the values of God’s kingdom of hope and healing, new life and salvation. Put down your swords. Listen to each other. Forgive each other.

This is the moral compass we are called to follow if our faith is to have meaning.

We can do this every day, one act of kindness at a time, one act of generosity and sacrifice at a time, one step at a time.

Who better to bring these values to the rest of the world than us?

AMEN