OK, show of hands, who’s tired of hearing about politics? Feel free to raise both hands if you’d like. It’s hard to believe the election was less than two weeks ago. I understand there are a wide range of emotions across this country, and even in this church. Some of us are hopeful and excited; some of us are angry and scared; and some of us are in the middle, from cautiously optimistic to hesitantly skeptical. But I’m pretty sure almost all of us are one thing: tired of it.

So I promise you this morning that, after six weeks of preaching sermons that had something to do with politics, I will not be talking about politics from the pulpit. Because…I have a solution! I know how to fix this whole mess. Can we admit that this experiment was a failure? Sure, it sounded good 240 years ago: sail to a new land, start our own country, install our own form of government based on an ancient Greek political system called democracy. Our first clue that it wouldn’t work is the fact that there are no ancient Greeks around anymore, so obviously it didn’t work for them. Democracy certainly has its good points – like voting and stuff – but for the most part, all it has accomplished is create division, conflict, friction among the people. Every four years, it seems like half the country is angry at the other half of the country.

So here’s what we should do. Let’s go back to a monarchy. Seriously! Our country is already set up to return to this rule, and our eating establishments are leading the way. Think about it: we have a Burger King, a Dairy Queen, and a White Castle. If we had a monarchy, everyone would know who’s in charge, there would be no squabbling over an electoral college, and anyone considering a protest would be strongly dissuaded by all the dead protesters from previous protests. The transition would go like this: “Son, you’re the next king.” So much easier!

OK, maybe a monarchy isn’t such a good idea. After all, that’s what we hopped on the Mayflower to get away from in the first place. Those first immigrants from the motherland of England really blazed a trail for us. I’m sure you remember their slogan: “Make America Great for the First Time.” America is here specifically because we didn’t like the idea of having some tyrant an ocean away telling us what to do. Unless your name is Elvis or Michael Jackson, we don’t take too kindly to kings around here.

So then, what are we to do with this Sunday? This Sunday is not only Thanksgiving Sunday; it also plays another important role in the life of the church. This is the last Sunday in the church liturgical year, which begins anew next week with the first Sunday of Advent. If the year starts with the anticipation of the birth of sweet little baby Jesus, how does it end? Today we celebrate the culmination of all that Jesus is, was and ever shall be. Today is what is known as Christ the King Sunday. This day serves as an important reminder of the supremacy and majesty of Christ, so that we don’t forget that the helpless infant born on Dec. 25 signifies something infinitely greater.

We don’t hear much about Christ the King Sunday, do we? In more recent times, this day has been called Reign of Christ Sunday instead of Christ the King as a way of combating male-dominated language used to describe Jesus. But another reason for that change in title has nothing to do with gender, but with government. Is it appropriate for Christians committed to democratic forms of government to refer to God as a reigning monarch? In other words, does the title “Christ the King” mean anything to us in 2016?
As I mentioned, we don’t have a lot of positive memories of kings in this country. And that ambivalence toward monarchs extends all the way back to biblical times. In the Old Testament book of 1 Samuel, the Israelites, wanted a king so they could be like all the other nations. God said, “What? Am I not good enough?” But the people persisted, so God gave them a king while warning them it wouldn’t go well, because when you give a person that much power, they’ll find 101 ways to mess things up. And for the most part, that’s exactly what happened. There were a few good apples thrown in there: even though they had their moral failings, King David and King Solomon are fondly remembered. But most of the kings were bonafide stinkers, like King Jehoram, who made sure there would be no contest to his reign by killing his six brothers. By the time we get to Jesus, the Romans are in charge, and the idea of a true king of Israel was only a hoped-for fantasy. During this time, there was only one king, and that was the emperor.

Since that time, our world has seen all kinds of kings, but very few that have left positive legacies. Today the language of kingship is not only outdated, it’s also offensive. History shows that kings reigned with iron fists and used their power to oppress, torture, and kill their opponents. So what are we supposed to do with the fact that one of the dominant metaphors in the Bible for Jesus is king? In various places Jesus is called King Eternal, King of Israel, King of the Jews, King of Kings, King of the Ages, and Ruler of the Kings of the Earth. While those titles convey a certain majesty and power, they really don’t speak to our modern understanding of authority. They don’t meaning anything to us in the practical sense. In Jesus’ time, to say he was king was a courageous statement, because it meant that you were denouncing the emperor’s claim to being the king. But when we call Jesus “king” today, who are we denouncing? The Burger King? It just doesn’t fit.

To understand the power of Jesus as King, we have to understand what kind of king he was. At the time, when the emperor ruled as a patriarchal, domineering king, here comes Jesus, this itinerant rabbi and rabble-rouser, who is eventually mocked and beaten and given a crown of thorns and slapped with the condescending label of “King of the Jews.” No one realized the truth of that statement until a few days after the crucifixion, when the tomb was found to be empty. And from that moment forward Christians dared to go against Caesar and pledge their allegiance to a different king, one who ruled in their hearts, not in their precinct or district.

To do so was a life-threatening act of faith for early Christians. Failure to renounce their faith in Christ the King and genuflect to the earthly king led to all kinds of torture and death. It wasn’t safe to call Jesus your king. You were inviting persecution and martyrdom. But Christians continued to do it, trumpeting their counter-cultural call of Jesus as sacrificial King over all earthly kings and compassionate Lord above all earthly lords.

But what about today? If you dare to call Jesus King of Kings and Lord of Lords, about the only thing that will get you is a place in the choir during Handel’s “Messiah.” There’s no risk in calling Christ our King, and there’s very little meaning in it, as well. That’s one of the challenges of being a Christian in a democracy; there just aren’t a lot of good governmental titles we can co-opt and use for Jesus. Jesus as our president? Jesus as our mayor? I don’t find a lot of meaning in proclaiming Jesus my personal Speaker of the House. If possible, those are even more meaningless to us than Jesus our king, because calling Jesus our king means we totally submit to him, and there’s no leader on earth about which we could say the same.

So we can no longer look to government for our Jesus metaphors. But the danger of not finding a culturally-relevant metaphor for Jesus is that he then becomes for us either some shapeless spiritual ambiguity or a personal salvation attendant. Both of those might speak to our
individual relationship with Christ, but not to the Christ who, as Paul says, “is far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age and the age to come.” That’s Christ the King, who speaks not only to our hearts but to our world, who has something more to offer than the powers and principalities that rule over us. If we can’t proclaim Christ as the king in our world, we won’t find much traction with Christ as the Lord of our lives, because we have to live our lives in the world. We can’t just proclaim Christ in here; we also have to do it out there.

One promising metaphor I heard recently from author Christine Chakoian is Christ as our Chief Executive Officer. At first the idea of Jesus as CEO might sound a bit business-y, but it takes on a different meaning when you realize that the word “corporation” comes from the Latin root “corpus,” as in Corpus Christi, the body of Christ.

What would it mean for Jesus to be our CEO? It means that we must constantly evaluate whether the mission of the corporation, the body, is being accomplished through us. What is that mission? I’d start with what Jesus says in Luke 4: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” That’s a pretty easy one to remember. Are we fulfilling the mission? Are we following the Boss’ lead? Are we having a positive impact on the bottom line, not revenue but changed lives?

Ok, so this metaphor isn’t perfect and we can name all kinds of ways that human CEOs aren’t like Jesus, just like human kings aren’t like the King of Kings. But Chakoian says if we’re willing to run with the CEO metaphor, we might find a more culturally relevant way to talk about Jesus on this Christ the King Sunday. For example, it might humble us to be reminded that God cared so much that he left the comfort of the corner office to come down and hang around his staff. We might be encouraged that Christ knows our frustration with working alongside those who don’t carry their weight or are consistently annoying. We might be strengthened to remember Jesus the CEO rolled up his sleeves in the muck of the factory and field, the hospital and kitchen, the halls of power and the temple of worship. We might find reassurance in the fact that our Boss has compassion for those of us who, out of exhaustion or discouragement, are tempted to cut corners or even walk away from the job.

Ultimately, any metaphor we use for Christ will fall short. You can’t describe what is indescribable. But whether Christ is the King or the CEO or Good Shepherd or the Prince of Peace, it’s important that we, as followers of Christ, live out our faith in a way that honors Christ’s rule in our hearts. We can’t do that no matter who is president, or governor, or mayor. If our leaders are acting in a way that honors Jesus’ mission statement, we can support them. If they are acting in a way that doesn’t honor it, we can oppose them and then work in our own lives to make that statement real. So here’s my one political statement today: If you supported our president-elect, then live your life in such a way that honors God and helps other people see God’s kingdom through you. If you didn’t support our president-elect, then live your life in such a way that honors God and helps other people see God’s kingdom through you. Who’s in charge? Well, I guess that depends on how you live your life.