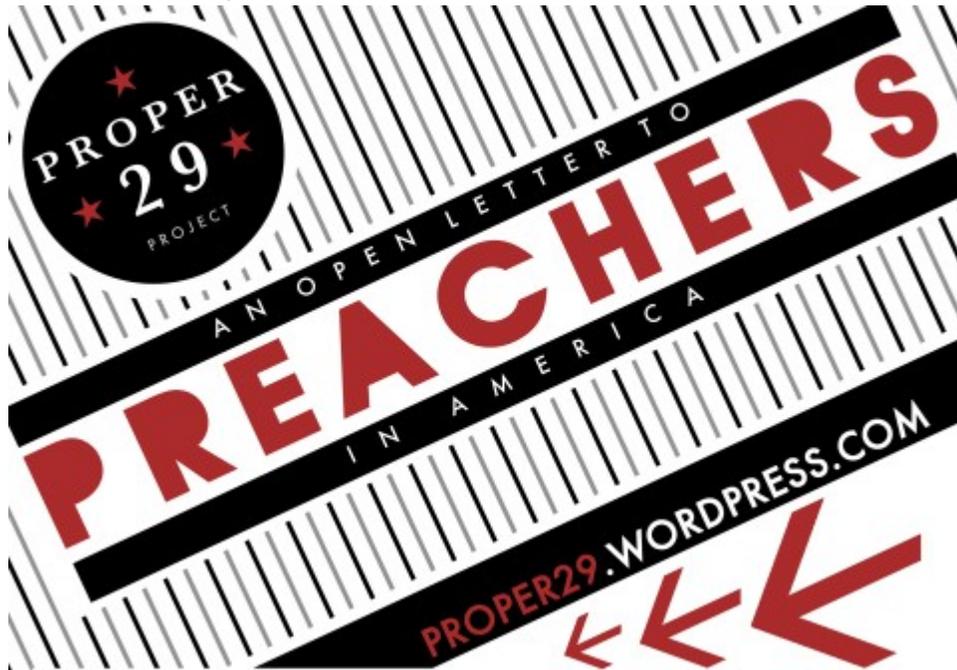


The war logs and the reign of Christ

By [Steve Thorngate](#)

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Reign of Christ Sunday is not the most approachable lectionary theme. Should the focus be on the reign or the one reigning? Should preachers assume each year that most people have no idea why the feast exists? Is there a case for just glossing over it, preaching on whatever suits you, and getting on with Advent?

The [Proper 29 Project](#) offers a good idea: use Reign of Christ Sunday as a reason to preach about war violence, in particular the recently leaked "[war logs](#)" documenting American and British complicity in civilian deaths in Iraq. "Knowing that we all stand under God's judgment," the project's organizers seek to speak out against such atrocities--but to avoid pointing the finger at the military without also acknowledging the moral responsibility of all Americans.

At first glance, the liturgical connection might not be obvious. But the Feast of Christ the King wasn't created to promote praise for Christ's majesty or to say nice things about life together under his rule. In the 1925 encyclical [that](#) established the feast day, Pope Pius XI asserted Christ's reign over *all things*. His shots at state power are

pretty removed from American Protestant commitments to the separation of church and state, but they also sparkle with prophetic intensity:

The Feast of Christ the King....will call to [earthly rulers'] minds the thought of the last judgment, wherein Christ, who has been cast out of public life, despised, neglected and ignored, will most severely avenge these insults; for his kingly dignity demands that the State should take account of the commandments of God and of Christian principles, both in making laws and in administering justice.

Pius XI had the secularized faithful in mind as well:

[Christ] must reign in our minds, which should assent...to the doctrines of Christ. He must reign in our wills, which should obey the laws and precepts of God. He must reign in our hearts, which should spurn natural desires and love God above all things.... He must reign in our bodies and in our members, which should serve as instruments for the interior sanctification of our souls, or to use the words of the Apostle Paul, *as instruments of justice unto God* [italics original].

Reign of Christ Sunday challenges the compartmentalized smallness of our faith and our tacit acceptance of the world's injustice. It has implications for everything we do, everything we fail to do, and everything in which we are complicit.