

## Sermon: FEAST OF CHRIST-THE-KING November 22d, 2015

In the Name...

A lion woke up one morning feeling a bit full of himself, so, he went out, cornered a hyena and roared, "Who is king of the animals?" The trembling hyena said, "You are, O mighty lion!" Later, the lion confronted an antelope and roared "Who is king of the animals?" The terrified antelope stammered, "Oh great lion, you are the king!" On a roll now, the lion swaggered up to an elephant and roared, "Who is king of the animals?" Without a word, the elephant snatched up the lion with his trunk, slammed him against a tree, dropped him on the ground, and ambled off. The crushed and bruised lion then lifted his head weakly and called after the elephant, "You don't have to get so angry just 'cause you don't know the answer!"

Well, today we have come to the last Sunday of the liturgical year, a Sunday known as the Feast of Christ the King and of all the festivals of the church year, Christmas, Easter, Ascension, etc. this is perhaps one which is hardest for us to grasp.

After all, what does the word "king" mean to you? Perhaps we think of ancient history, or King Arthur and the Round Table. Maybe we conjure up, how else, Elvis. I once asked some young people to name a king and one said Burger King. But, that just goes to show how distant the concept of a king is from our daily lives.

And, historically, Americans have had problems with kings. After all, we fought a war of independence from the most powerful king of his time and one reason many of our ancestors came to settle these shores was to flee the authority of kings in their homelands and that may be our biggest problem with this image of Christ. It's not that the metaphor is obscure or irrelevant; the real problem is that we know what it means.

We know that kings are people who issue commands that others are supposed to obey. They are people who have subjects and a major part of our national character is that we are nobody's subjects. Even at the opening procession of the Olympic Games, we refuse to observe the common courtesy of dipping our flag to the presiding officer. Americans bow to no one.

So how can we deal with Christ, the King?

Perhaps, by first realizing that Jesus was a different sort of king to any human one and that's what confused the Chief Priests and Pontius Pilate, the disciples and the crowds, alike. A king demands obedience, awe, and respect, but, Jesus never seems to lord it over others. Kings use their authority to pass judgement, but, when two brothers ask Jesus to settle a property dispute he declines to get involved. Kings usually tell us what we are to do, "or else." But, if we look at the Gospels we might be surprised to find that there are very few times Jesus tells us to do anything and hardly anywhere can we find an "or else."

Instead, what we find is what he told Pilate. Listen to my voice, the voice of truth. That's how Jesus shows kingship, by example and teaching. He didn't give us a book of rules; he gave us a book of life, his life. He went out about his Father's business and told stories, parables, which

we're supposed to use to figure out what we're supposed to do. He ate with outcasts and taught us how to welcome those who are unwelcome. He healed on the Sabbath and commented about the engraving on a coin and, so, he taught us to have God at the centre and not possessions or prejudices. He prayed for his executioners and taught us how to love the unlovable even in the midst of the greatest injustice.

An earthly king is concerned only with our actions. Jesus goes much further. He's concerned with our very being. Yes, he does demand obedience, awe, and respect. And we should give it, but, not because of what he can do to hurt us if we don't, rather because of what he did for us and is doing for us to give us more abundant life that we can imagine or deserve.

And just because he's given us a lot of leeway in figuring things out doesn't mean that is motto is like that of Burger King, "Have it your way." Oh, no. He has a way. He is the way, the truth, the life. And if we want to share his life then we have to follow his way and learn his truth.

But, that takes work. And there are times the freedom which Christ gives us can be so difficult to live with, so frustrating, that we lose patience with him and we want a stronger king than Jesus, someone to tell us what to do, someone to make our decisions for us, someone who can relieve us of the burden of thinking.

That was Satan's temptation in the wilderness. Satan knew that if Jesus turned stones to bread and kept us fed we'd follow him; if he destroyed all the warring empires and gave us world peace and prosperity we'd follow him; if he entertained us with spectacles we'd follow him - like slaves. Satan knew this because he knows our weaknesses, our laziness. Jesus, on the other hand, rejected these because he knows our strengths. He knows we have brains and souls, minds and hearts, and he wants us to use them because we are more than mere subjects, we are members of his royal family.

Our Gospel passage showed us that amazing interview between Jesus and Pilate. Pilate, who represented the most powerful ruler on the earth. Jesus, who was the creator of the earth. It's a confusing exchange because it seems that it's the prisoner asking the questions and the prosecutor who's having trouble with the answers. You can almost sense the frustration.

Pilate knows all about kingship and in Jesus he senses something familiar. But, the context is all wrong. And so, he washes his hands. Yet, he places on the cross, for all to see, the result of his examination of the prisoner: Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews.

So what does it mean for us to call Jesus a King? He has power, but, he exercised his power by serving, forgiving, healing; by sacrificing himself for others. His power is the power of faith, the power of hope, the power of love - the power of life itself.

Pilate's question, "Are you a king?" remains. It's a question about who's in charge when your world is falling apart; about to whom you can turn when in need; about from whom you seek justice or mercy. Jesus answered that he is the one, the only one, who brings peace of body, mind, and spirit to all who follow him.

So, what sort of king do we follow? The Burger King or Christ the King? There's at least one world of difference.

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