

## Christ the King – Year C – November 21, 2022

Pastor Lindsey Jorgensen-Skakum

Holy Spirit Lutheran Church

Grace to you all from God, who is always working to usher in Christ's reign of justice and peace throughout all creation - Amen.

When I ask you to think of the word King – what comes to mind?

- Is it some majestically robed leader poised on a throne?
- Is it an image of their power, like a sceptre or a crown?
- Maybe it's even a specific ruler.

In many ways our understanding of kingship or modern monarchy is very romantic. Think of how fascinated we are with royalty: Their lives are told through films and TV shows, they fill tabloid magazines, and their deaths are marked by countless people around the world.

There is just something about those kings and queens that grabs our attention. Whether it's their power, their privilege, or their fortune – perhaps we simply can't help but wonder what it would be like to be them.

Yet, as much as we might idolize them, we also have come to know the damaging effects of imperial rule. Right here, in our own nation, we are beginning to understand the ways in which colonial powers destroyed the lives of Indigenous peoples across Turtle Island. This damage continues to mark First Nations Peoples and the land we share, leaving a still-healing scar as more stories and graves surface from the horrors of residential schools.

Perhaps because of this and other hard truths, kingship doesn't really mean much to us as it once did. So, what exactly do we do with this celebration of Christ as King? And why, when we're just about ready to start preparing for the Advent and Christmas, are we reading about Jesus' crucifixion?

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The answer to these questions has to do with the basic theme not only of this week's readings but of last weeks as well. It has to do with faithfulness and how we are to act as people and saints of God here and now.

In today's passage from the prophet Jeremiah, God is rebuking the shepherds of Israel. Like the false prophets of last week who were living evil lives by leading others away from God, the shepherds — that is, the religious leaders of Jeremiah's time — were not attending to their sheep, to the flock of the God of Israel.

God says, *“Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter. Woe to those who are unfaithful.”* God promises to raise up a king who will be wise and just and righteous. The prophet Jeremiah was expressing the people's hope for an end to their exile and the hope for a new and just leader — someone who would lead their nation with peace and redemption.

In our second reading today, Paul takes up this image of the kingship and gives us a picture of Christ as not only king of our world, but also as the king of all creation. In this section of his letter to the Colossians, Paul is actually quoting an ancient hymn of praise. In it, Jesus is called “the image of God,” in whom all things in heaven and on earth were created. He is the head of the church. In him all the fullness of God dwells.

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Yet we know Jesus wasn't born like any king of his time. He was born into a poor Jewish family. Riches and social position did not define the kind of kingship Christ would be entering into. But in the last verse of this passage from Paul's letter gives us a hint as to why the Gospel describing Jesus' crucifixion is used after all this talk about the power and dominion of the king. Paul says that "through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things."

This is adding a new dimension to our understanding of faithfulness and kingship. When we celebrate Christ the King, we're holding up a king who is, first and foremost, a redeemer, a reconciler, a servant. This is not a king who comes to exercise domination over people or the earth. This is a king who comes to show us how to live as a people of God in the kingdom of God here and now.

We have a king who has reconciled us to God, who calls us to make peace, and yet we celebrate this kingship with a Gospel passage on the crucifixion. Doesn't that seem strange?

It would be strange if the crucifixion were the end of the story, but we all know it isn't. The crucifixion leads to the resurrection – to the great hope found in the promises of God. In Christ we see not only a king who suffers and dies reconciling us to God, but also a king who rises again and again to bring us our greatest hope.

That hope touches on the other very important part of this Gospel: That Christ lived out his kingship within the community. We are all loved by God and we are all forgiven by God. We are a part of a community that includes the past, the present, and the future – the saints in all times and places.

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We're linked with the thief who asked Christ for forgiveness in today's Gospel, just as we're linked to countless others – including the thief who *denied* Jesus. We're linked with many who are very much like ourselves, but we're also linked with lots of people who aren't just like us. So, what does this mean for us?

Sometimes, we have to call others to repentance, and sometimes we have to forgive others. But sometimes we are the ones who need forgiveness; sometimes we are the ones being called to repent. Where we are all alike is in our need of God's mercy, our need for the kind of kingdom God offers, the one where God is pleased to reconcile all things to themselves through their divine loving grace.

That's the invitation we respond to in our baptism, and in our daily life as saints of God. To participate in God's kingdom here, now and today – ushering in Christ's hope for a better world. Not through power, dominion, or corruption, but through the lifegiving grace of God. A grace that calls us forth to build a kingdom and community founded on God's love. A kingdom that has long been here in our midst - moving and working for good whether we knew it or not. And as we come to worship this Sunday as we have so many before, we are challenged and transformed to be the saints of God where ever Christ our king is leading us within our community and world.

And may this be so among us. Amen.