

"Christ the King" Sunday

Matthew 25:31-32, 40

'When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. Then the king will say to those at his right hand, "Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me." Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?" And the king will answer them, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family,* you did it to me." Then he will say to those at his left hand, "You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me." Then they also will answer, "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?" Then he will answer them, "Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me."

Season 4 of "The Crown" is out now on Netflix. Perhaps you are a fan of this show?

Americans, long ago rejected the idea of having a king. Though following the American Revolution, there were those who urged George Washington to assume a role like a "king" because a monarchy was what the form of government that people knew best.

Washington wisely turned it down. He was also hesitant to become our nation's first President. He declined a third term, feeling he did not want the new position of President to become like a "kingship" in our nation.

While we are no longer governed by a monarch, Americans still seem to have an attraction to all things "royal," like "The Crown" or the real-life drama that takes place in Buckingham Palace.

Boston University Professor, Arianne Chernock, who teaches modern British history, says. **"The fact that America was once British, that this once was our royal family, is significant in this story. ... For Americans**

especially, we've grown up with Disney films. We are captivated by the fairy tale elements that are on display (in public).

Maybe she is on to something?

Fun fact: besides the British royal family there are only 28 other monarchies in our world. Most kings and queens hold only perfunctory titles, while wielding very little if any power. They are more the national figureheads tied to a nation's historical identity.

Of course, long before our fairy tale like obsession with the very royalty whose oppressive rule the Colonists fought to overthrow, another nation was drawn to the romantic notion of a "king."

Israel, like the Colonists, was trying to figure out how they should govern themselves. The twelve tribes had tried various other forms of leadership, but they desired more. They wanted a king! And as we heard (know), God reluctantly gave them what they wanted.

George R.R. Martin, author of the famous "Game of Thrones" series, writing in "A Storm of Swords" asks: **"Why do the gods make kings and queens if not to protect the ones who can't protect themselves?"**

Which is what God charged Saul, David, Solomon, and all the various people who stepped into the role of king. It was their responsibility on God's behalf to protect and care for all the people including the most vulnerable with compassion, mercy and justice.

Yet all of the kings failed in their responsibilities to the people, and some worse than others. Greed, corruption, selfishness filled their hearts turning them from God's commandments to love and care for the people. They worshipped idols, bowing to the gods of military might, weaponry, money, and power.

Scholars suggest the worst of the kings was Manasseh. In addition to being greedy and corrupt, selfishly serving his own interests over the people of God, he introduced "child-sacrifice" into the Temple. Eventually, he is killed by his own cabinet members.

We are reminded that kings, like all political leaders, are only human and fallible. All of the kings of Israel and Judah failed in their responsibilities in caring for God's people, even the best ones.

With this in mind, and with the knowledge that today, why do we in the "Church" celebrate Christ the King Sunday?

Is the image of Christ as "King" and God's "Kingdom" archaic?

Maybe we should change Jesus' title to something new? How about "Divine President," "Holy Guru" or "Sacred Prime Minister"? Those would be strange at best and given the current corruption of national leaders around the world, why would we want to associate Jesus by title to any of them?

So maybe the real question before us is not how do we recognize Christ as "King" of our lives. Rather, what does it mean for us, who claim to be followers of Jesus, to make him the most central part of our lives, affirming our including our national allegiances or party affiliations?

What does saying, "Jesus is Lord" of our lives mean for how we live our daily lives in relationship others? Does this profession of faith shape our world view?

Hans Kung offers us this thought about that "kingdom" we pray will come on earth as in heaven:

"What kind of kingdom will this be? It will be a kingdom where, in accordance with Jesus' promises, the poor, the hungry, those who weep and those who are downtrodden will finally come into their own; where pain, suffering and death will have an end."

If this is the promised kingdom, then what type of leader would we want to rule it? I would suggest to you the One who suffered in love for you, for me, for all the world.

Royal titles were of little interest to Jesus. How we treat people - the hungry, the sick, the immigrant, those in prison, the marginalized, the voiceless, is what matters above all else to Jesus.

Jesus speaks to this in the Gospel of Matthew 25, saying: "And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.'"

I like how a colleague, Maren Tirabassi speaks to Jesus' message with these words:

Improv on Matthew 25: 41-46

Then the One in the story,
never intended for condemnation,
but to teach a new way of living,
said to those who give a bad name
to any of God's creatures,
but especially the ones with dancing hooves
who love their own kids ...

"I was a server with a hungry family,
and, because it was curbside,
you didn't bother to tip."

"I was thirsty for a phone call,
but you scolded me for not figuring
out Zoom and livestream
to take advantage of the church's
wonderful programming."

"I was vulnerable as a naked child,
and you exercised
your (Satan-given) right
not to wear a mask."

"I was a teacher
(you knew from your older child
who had hours of after-school help),
but suddenly I was the stranger
you publicly blamed
for your seven-year-old's
virtual school year."

"I was in the hospital
and you unfriended me
because, you know, contact tracing."

"Well, it wasn't prison,
though it felt that way,
behind my plexiglass shield all day
scanning your purchases,
and you never even said, 'hello.'"

The ones who were certainly human
said, "When did we see you ...
hungry, thirsty, naked, a stranger, sick or in prison?"

And the Storyteller said, That's the point."

Friends, we show our true allegiance to Christ, lifting him up above all
our other loyalties when we serve one another in the spirit of God's love,
compassion and mercy.

How can offer our loyalty to any other?

Amen.