

Christ Is King

Have you ever found yourself in a situation where you wondered, "Just who is the leader of this outfit?" Maybe it was at work, or at school, some club or organization, even your church and it wasn't clear who was leading. Sometimes there is competition for power and leadership and so it's unclear just who's in charge. "Take us to your leader."

Long ago Americans (1776) removed themselves from government by a king for one whose power was dispersed among the people. That is, we moved from kingdom to republic. Yet, there still seems to be a fascination with kings and queens – and I sometimes wonder if there is a yearning as well. For some there's an emotional connection with the word and concept of king or queen. Why is that? Is there something within the human psyche that yearns for a sovereign leader? Is there a hunger these days for someone on whom we can pin our hopes and dreams; someone who will make it all right; a good king or queen who will meet all our needs?

Some of these desires get projected onto those in our society who have become, in a sense, the modern kings of the day. People want to be in their presence as though by getting close enough they will somehow find themselves and have their life clarified. It's as if they think they will find themselves if they can just get close enough to the people who hold kingship in their lives. My generation remembers how intensely young girls wanted to be in the presence of the Beatles; and before that was Elvis, "the King." This century we've had youth who want to not only be in the presence of, but also be imitators of Britney, Paris, and Lindsay, the queens of "Duh? Whatever!" Now, a mere five months after his death, people flock by the thousands to see the Michael Jackson movie *This Is It*, starring the "King of Pop" himself. Who wouldn't gladly accept an invitation to a White House party and be near the President?

So often kingship is conferred by celebrity status. Kings and queens of modern society are live out their days on the pages of the *National Enquirer* and in countless gossip columns. But these "royalty" will ultimately disappoint us because they don't identify with us. They prop up the image that the culture expects them to have, rather than who they really are. Which is why they can never help us be our true selves. They are on a pedestal of human expectation gone wild; and we know that the only way off a pedestal is down. There are variations on this theme – not everyone falls for celebrities. There are other substitutes for kings and queens: education, career, "unsung" heroes and leaders... But the result is the same: our dreamed of utopia never comes.

So what's in a king anyway? From the earliest stories of humanity, kings were people whose greatness came not from regal glory and glitter, but either from battling enemies or from the ashes of loss and crisis. It was often from tragedy that they formed wisdom and insight to give to their people. There is the wounded king of King Arthur's court - the Fisher King - who lived with a wound that never healed but continually gave him insight into the human condition; a wound which invited people into his presence to learn and be healed themselves. There is the story collected by the Grimm brothers (19th century) called "Iron John," about a king-like man whose greatness came only after he stayed a lengthy time in the dark bottom of a pond. The water had a magical quality about it. When a young boy with a cut finger came to the pond to visit with Iron John, he dipped his wounded finger in the pond and it turned to gold. The wound did not disappear, but it remained covered with gold and shone like the sun. One of the truths of the story of Iron John is that where a person's wound is, that is where his genius will be.

Some years ago Henri Nouwen wrote a little book entitled, *The Wounded Healer*. The book begins by recounting an old rabbinic tale of a healer who binds the wounds of others, even as he is binding his own wounds. Of course Christian cannot help but think of these words from the Bible – the prophet Isaiah (53:5) – "...the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed."

We are much nearer to Thanksgiving, Advent, and Christmas than we are to Good Friday. Yet here we are reading from the Bible this passage about the trial of Jesus before Pilate. What's that all about? The focus is *not* the passion of Christ. Rather, on this Sunday we courageously affirm together what Pilate only skeptically

inquired about: namely, the kingship of Jesus. If you go into some churches (usually older ones) you may see various symbols. One that was carved into the wooden communion table at the church where I grew up used to puzzle me. It was these initials on the cross: "INRI." I doubt that 1% of the congregation would have known the meaning of the initials without asking for an explanation, but then symbols are meant to inspire such inquiries (see Exodus 12:26-27). I learned that those initials recalled the Latin words that were posted on Jesus' cross by Pontius Pilate: "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews" (John 19:19). What Pilate posted above Jesus' head on the cross was meant to be a mockery of him and an insult to the Jews. But so many years after that humiliating death and apparent defeat, we continue to recall Pilate's "INRI", and rejoice in the One who is King of kings and Lord of lords (Revelation 17:14). This story of a king who battled our enemies; who, like us, knows the wounds of human life; whose wounds can heal ours; and who brought triumph from tragedy is unlike any of the other stories of such kings. The difference is that this story is true.

This story began a thousand years before Jesus appeared before Pilate. In previous weeks we read from the Old Testament books of 1 Samuel and Ruth, learning that right choices laid a foundation for the legacy of King David the promised descendant of David, who will bring God's will to pass; the true king who will reign in perfect justice, peace, and security. In John's gospel, that king has arrived on the scene, but he is almost entirely unrecognized. Then, in the Revelation, he is finally enthroned, and he is universally recognized – the day we anticipate and celebrate on this the last Sunday of the Christian year: Christ the King Sunday.

I don't need to remind you that we live in a time when the word terrorism has become common parlance to express a grave reality. Nations are in strife, there are wars; there are hurricanes, earthquakes, and tsunamis. There is political and cultural division in our own nation. It can all seem overwhelming and out of control. Who's in charge? It is precisely here and now that we say Jesus is in charge. Christ, the One who was crucified for our sins, rose from the dead to lead and rule over all. He can encompass your life and mine, and can guide and carry us from cradle to grave, and even beyond. He is the One who can lead nations to peace.

The Scriptures attest to the fact that God intends to redeem the world through Christ, one person at a time, starting with you. Christ will extend his kingdom when he becomes king of each heart, of each person. So the question we always ask ourselves as Christians, those who gather in Christ's name, is this: is Christ king of my life?

When we first accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior we call this salvation or being "saved." But for Him to fulfill his leadership we must allow Him to grow in us. This is called sanctification. We are first saved then sanctified. Now, there are some things in life that so important that we have to be intentional about them. Some things we cannot afford to just leave up to whether or not we feel like doing them. Some things have to become an established part of our lives, so we don't have to decide and re-decide to do them. Sanctification in Christ is one of those things. For him to truly be our leader, your leader, He must be allowed to enter the core of our being - where he can regenerate you and me as we learn to set aside our own preferences, our "rights," for the sake of His. That's how we can be part of bringing justice to a broken and unjust world.

Sanctification is not a matter of displacing the self. Where else is the self supposed to go? What we mean is letting Christ control and lead the whole self. It's a matter of cooperating with the Holy Spirit to be regenerated so that we want to align our wills with God's will. This is really the only way to become our true selves. That's why we have all this stuff I urge you into, like attending worship, prayer, giving money, fellowship, and service. We do this stuff because we intend to be shaped by Christ through them. This is what makes Christ the King of our lives.

When visitors come to our church, or someone asks you about your church, they may want to know who the leader is. That's because it gives them an idea of the values of the church, the direction it might be headed, the style of relationships. Now you can imagine that many people look to the pastor as church leader - this has its upside and downside. People may want an instant answer to their question, or an instant decision (in their favor) for some dilemma, an instant solution to some problem. They may be disappointed in a pastor who cannot always give the answer, decision, or solution. Isn't he or she the leader? Where Christ is truly head of the church, His power and wisdom is not often solely deposited with the pastor, but dispersed among the faithful believers of the congregation. It may be frustrating to be referred to someone else when you want something right now. But the Body of Christ has its way. Christ is head. He's in charge, working for the

redemption of all peoples. As it says in Scripture, “Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth” (Rev. 1:5); if that is true, then surely he must be our king as well.

Our words and works of love may pass away, but Christ's kingdom, the truth, will endure forever. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last. He is One who was, and is, and is to come ... the One who gathers us from all nations into His kingdom today. He is the One who has the power to make your life worthy. This is our faith. This is our testimony. He is our future and our hope.

The song by Robin Mark) says of him:

You're the Lion of Judah, the Lamb who was slain, You ascended to heaven and evermore will reign;
At the end of the age, when the earth You reclaim, You will gather the nations before You.

And the eyes of all men will be fixed on the Lamb who was crucified
With wisdom and mercy and justice You'll reign at Your Father's side.