

“Kings and Kingdoms” · Psalm 46; Colossians 1:11-20; Luke 23:33-43  
Sheth LaRue · November 20, 2022  
First Presbyterian Church of Benton Harbor

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Throughout the course of our relationship with Christ, we often find that our Lord has many titles: Creator, Shiloh, Prophet, True Vine, Good Shepherd. These titles tend to shift and morph as our relationship with Christ ebbs and flows, as our understanding of who God is builds and shrinks. There are days when I’m so very grateful that Jesus is the Good Shepherd<sup>1</sup> because I tend to wander off from the flock. And there are days when I need Jesus as Mediator<sup>2</sup> because there are some things I need to hash out with God. And there are days when I need Jesus to be Emmanuel<sup>3</sup>, God-with-us, because I cannot possibly face the difficulties of this world alone.

Jesus had a lot of titles and names conferred upon him through prophesies and prophets, by followers, by earthly rulers and profiteers. Many of those monikers may not resonate with us in our modern, day-to-day lives, and some of us may be creative enough and close enough to Christ to give him some personalized titles: Buddy Jesus, always-saves-me-a-parking-space Christ, Jesus, healer of my broken heart (once again).

This morning as we gather, we do so with our siblings across this big, blue marble and we celebrate the close of the Christian calendar year – this is our Christian new years eve! And on this day, one week before the start of Advent, we celebrate the kingship and kingdom of Christ: today is ‘Christ the King’ Sunday! (yay)

Through the American Revolutionary War, the Americans in the original thirteen colonies defeated the British and gained independence from the British crown. Our July celebrations, with fireworks and hot dogs and ice cream, are all-but-revolutionary, nevertheless they are festive remembrances of the work our ancestors did to remove themselves from the kingdom of Britain. Our nation was formed from our foreparents walking away from a king and his kingdom, and I would venture to guess that many of us have a collective, generational distrust of the reigns of kings. Kings and kingdoms are foreign ideas to many – if not all – of us, and so coming to understand the power and beauty of Christ as King can be a challenge to both our knowledge and our sensibilities.

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<sup>1</sup> John 10:11

<sup>2</sup> Hebrews 9:15

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 1:23

Let's imagine for a moment what a king might look like...a man is dressed in a long, flowing purple robe that drapes across his highly-decorated military uniform. One hand holds an ancient scepter, the other sits atop the hilt of his sword, and atop the king's head sits a jeweled crown. The king himself sits on a raised, golden throne, high above his subjects.

Now let's imagine for a moment what a king might do. He entertains the wealthy guests from across his kingdom and he rewards with positions of power those who donate the most to his kingdom. The king travels, surveying his great kingdom and relishes in being served by his global subjects. And the king meets with the powerful elite as they dictate and decide the outcomes of global wars, natural disasters, and economic crises.

If I'm perfectly honest with you, I am not the fan of kings and kingdoms because the earthly examples we have of them aren't exactly the greatest, right? The kings that have been most prominent have far-too-often been less-than stellar in their rule and reign as they invaded sovereign nations and trampled over sovereign peoples. The kings and kingdoms we know of from history have been fraught with arrogance and pomposity, with an unquenchable need for power and prestige. The kings and kingdoms we know of rule with an iron fist, look down on the lowly, and take advantage of the weak.

Let's shift for a moment from our imaginations and let's read from the twenty-third chapter of Luke, verses thirty-three to forty-three. [read passage]

This coronation found in Luke is unlike anything we could ever imagine for a king, right? Because kings are loved and honored, they're respected and powerful, they're the ones ordering the crucifixions – they're not supposed to be the ones being crucified! Kings are strong and powerful and they die with dignity and honor, not...this!

And yet *this* is our king – this is the King of kings and the Lord of lords.<sup>4</sup> This king – *our* king – is stripped naked, nailed to a cross, and mocked by his abusers. This king – *our* king – in his final moments, chose to console a common thief who hung on a cross beside him. This king – *our* king – established a reign here on earth that is beyond our wildest comprehension, but is easily within our possibilities. Jesus may not have been the king anyone ever expected but he's the king anyone ever needed.

Our king lived a life far removed from majestic palaces and but that doesn't mean he didn't live a life of abundance. Our king lived a life far removed from positions of earthly power

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<sup>4</sup> 1 Timothy 6:15

but that doesn't mean he didn't have authority or influence. Our king had high standards and modeled right behavior but never once looked down on those who couldn't live up to them.

Our king made possible a kingdom founded on love and he likened his kingdom to the love that is given freely and without hesitation to the son who has squandered his inheritance in a foreign land and has returned home feeling dejected and worthless, only to be met with celebration and joy because of the father's great love and expansive forgiveness.<sup>5</sup> No one is treated like 'less-than' in this king's reign!

Our king made possible a kingdom founded on compassion and he likened his kingdom to a shepherd who loves each of his sheep so fiercely that when one is lost, the shepherd goes in search of the lost one and does not give up until it is found.<sup>6</sup> And when that lost sheep is found the shepherd rejoices! No one is treated with hostility in this king's reign!

Our king made possible a kingdom founded on inclusion and he likened his kingdom to a rich man who throws a party and, when the intended guests are too busy to attend, the man opens wide his front doors and invites the poor, the blind, and the lame to take part in the feast.<sup>7</sup> No one is left out in this king's reign!

Our king made possible a kingdom that was present and active and he encouraged his followers to manifest this kingdom by following in the ways in which the king lived his life. Our king's kingdom seeks out the hurt and hurting, making ways to bring healing and wholeness to their lives. Our king's kingdom doesn't build taller walls, it builds longer tables and welcomes all who come seeking a home. Our king's kingdom sits in and learns from difficult conversations about sexual and gender orientation and invites all to live as God created them to be. Our king's kingdom acknowledges its harmful and hurtful past as it lived apart from God, and works to ensure present and future generations can learn and be better.

As people living in this great and glorious reign of Christ, we know without a doubt – just as the psalmist did – that “God is our refuge and strength, a help always near in times of great trouble. That's why we won't be afraid when the world falls apart...the Lord of heavenly forces is with us! The God of Jacob is our place of safety.”<sup>8</sup> God didn't just make this world and walk

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<sup>5</sup> Luke 15:11-23

<sup>6</sup> Luke 15:1-7

<sup>7</sup> Luke 14:16-23

<sup>8</sup> Psalm 46:1, 11, Common English Bible.

away from us, no God is active and present in the world this very day and God is active and present here among us, the citizens of Christ's reign.

What does it mean to you that your king was crucified? What does it mean to you that your king lived a life of service and sacrifice? What does it mean to you that your king rejected the ways of this world and brought about a new way of living and loving? The king is madly in love with you and wants nothing more than for you to live and thrive in the reign of his kingdom. The king and his kingdom is for you and is for your neighbor. The king – our king – calls you to participate in this glorious, new life; will you say yes to him and the life he offers?

Friends, just as Paul did for the Colossians, I “pray that God will show you everything he wants you to do and that you may have all the wisdom and understanding his Spirit gives. Then you will live a life that honors the Lord and you will always please him by doing good deeds. You will come to know God even better. His glorious power will make you patient and strong enough to endure anything, and you will be truly happy. I pray that you will be grateful to God for letting you have part in what he has promised his people in the kingdom of light. God rescued us from the dark power of Satan and brought us into the kingdom of his dear son who forgives our sins and sets us free.”<sup>9</sup>

Thy kingdom come, Jesus. Thy will be done. On earth as it is in heaven. Amen.

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<sup>9</sup> Colossians 1:9-14, Contemporary English Version.