

Thy Kingdom Come©

Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24; Matthew 25:31-46 November 26, 2017 Rev. Sharlyn DeHaven Gates

This morning those who observe the liturgical church calendar, as we are, are celebrating the Feast of Christ the King. It is the last Sunday of the church year. We look back on where we've been, on all we've accomplished as Christ's Body, and we celebrate the mission and ministry that we have been about, the things we feel were successful.

We give thanks, at the end of this church year and of course, we have just given thanks at the celebration of our American Tradition we call Thanksgiving - for the blessings and all the richness in our lives.

But, just as many of us do when we celebrate a new year coming, we also review and reflect on the places that were not so good: we remember mistakes we made, relationships lost, those things and people we grieve over, the areas where we failed and the places in our past where we need to ask for forgiveness.

And, as the church, the Body of Christ, we look toward Advent, starting next Sunday – the advent of a new year, of a new beginning, of Christ's kingdom entering anew into our old worn out way of life.

But this Sunday isn't just about looking back or looking forward. It is, for the people who follow Christ Jesus, a time to think about whether or not he truly is the King – king of our hearts, our minds, our love, our lives.

And is Jesus a king here and now – or somewhere in the future, somewhere in another kingdom?

This kind of talk is a bit odd for us, isn't it? We Americans have presidents we elect. We are a democracy! (Well, we act mostly like a democracy.) We don't have a king or a queen, or a ruler. We don't have kingdoms or castles or princes and princesses. That is for other countries who may still have them but even *they* don't have the power they used to have.

So, what does it mean for us to say that Jesus is King? What does it mean to you? Here we are in the year 2017. We are free and independent. We Americans are self-sufficient, the determiner of our own destiny – at least we like to think we are.

And if Jesus is a king, then where is his kingdom? What does it look like? If we are living in his kingdom, where is he? Does he dwell and rule from a castle that's somewhere high in the sky? Far removed from us? Does King Jesus stand at the window of the castle looking down at us in the distance?

In 2003, I had the opportunity to travel to southern Germany and see the Neuschwanstein Castle that King Ludwig II built. You can see the picture there on the screen. It was beautiful to see, especially looking up at it from way down below.

It was beautiful inside, but cold and unwelcoming. I would hate to live in a castle like that. This is the castle that Disney modeled their famous castle after. You know, where fairy tales are true; where Tinker Bell goes flying around, waving her magic wand.

I remember standing at one of the windows in the castle looking out at the mountains and looking down at the king's kingdom below where his subjects would have lived. It was breathtaking, but so disconnected. There surely was not much of a relationship between King Ludwig and his subjects.

Of course, we have a modern-day image of royalty that we see off and on as we watch the news of a fascinating event in England, like a royal wedding or something very special. The people there are thrilled with their royals, and many of us here in the United States are, as well.

We all have seen that image of Queen Elizabeth standing on that balcony with Prince Charles and Camilla, with William and Kate, little Prince George and Princess Charlotte - and good looking Harry, all waving at the people who are crowded below, everyone trying to get a good glimpse of the Queen and her family.

Is that what we envision Jesus the King as being like? Is that what the kingdom looks like?

At one point Jesus said "The Kingdom of God is very near." And another time he proclaimed the Kingdom of God is here. Which is it? And does it matter, really? Won't we all see God's kingdom when we get to heaven?

And yet we often talk about bringing in the Kingdom. We ask that our offerings and our work be a part of helping establish God's kingdom on earth until Christ comes again.

If the Kingdom of God is *near*, and if it is *here*, then it must be one of those "and yet" kinds of thing. The Kingdom arrived when Jesus came to earth – *and yet* – it isn't fully here until he returns someday to fully establish his Kingdom on earth.

But our Scripture in Matthew 25 gives us some idea of, not only what the kingdom will look like, but also, what we should be doing to help it along while we wait.

Just as we have in our Old Testament lesson today, Jesus too, uses the sheep metaphor. Only he uses sheep and goats. He says the king will come and separate the sheep from the goats. The sheep will be on the right and the goats on his left. I suspect Jesus uses these metaphors of sheep and goats in a way that the people would really understand – maybe far better than we can today.

We aren't all that familiar with sheep and goats – not generally anyway. But sheep are known to be followers – so they would be the ones who follow the shepherd. Where he leads they will follow.

Goats, on the other hand, are stubborn creatures who like to butt heads with one another and anyone and anything that gets in their way.

I think Jesus is painting a picture here of those who follow him and those who follow themselves.

And the king will say to those on his right (the sheep; the followers) – you are blessed because of all the things you have done to me. When I was hungry you fed me. When I was naked you gave me clothes. When I was in prison you came to visit me, when I was sick you took care of me.

And the sheep will say, as they look around at one another with amazement, when did we do all that, Lord?

And the King will say to them, when you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me. You are blessed. You will be blessed by my Father.

Unfortunately, the goats didn't fare so well. They were the ones who were calloused and uncaring; head-butters, they were the ones who were all about their goat-selves. They really never gave it much thought. They were just self-consumed. So, of course, they too were filled with amazement when the King said "you did nothing when you saw me hungry or naked or sick or in prison. You did absolutely *nothing*."

And with astonishment, they asked "when did we ever see you like that?" And Jesus said the same thing to them. "If you saw one of my little precious ones hurting and you ignored them and let them suffer – you did all that to me. And that's not what my kingdom is about.

Jesus makes it very clear in everything we read about him that if he is our King, then we will do the things he cares most about – we will care for those who are hurting. We will show compassion and love, as he has us.

His Kingdom is so different from the world's idea of royalty, isn't it? At least it is different while it is being developed here on earth, while we wait for his final coming. Maybe – maybe then there will be those streets of gold and pearly gates. I don't think we know that for sure. But it is very obvious that that is the opposite of what Jesus cares about for us on earth.

When we pray the Lord's prayer, Jesus taught us to say "Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done – on earth as it is in heaven."

If Jesus is our King, then we long for his Kingdom to come – a Kingdom where there will be no more hunger, no more sickness, no more suffering. It will be a Kingdom where everyone has enough and everyone is happy and praising the King.

On this Christ the King Sunday I invite you to ask yourself – "Is Jesus truly my King? Is he the ruler of my heart and of my actions? Do the things I do for others show my love and obedience to him?"

Sometimes I think we get overwhelmed with the thought of trying to help everyone we see who is suffering. We have to be careful that we don't build a little wall around us so we can't feel as much. We don't want to feel so much because we are so aware that our little bit of help is just a small drop in the bucket of all the suffering the world knows.

But if we remember that for every single person we offer help to, we are also doing it to Jesus himself. That's how much he cares for every single one of those whom he calls "the least of the members of his family."

And that's how the Kingdom of God is near. That's how we are helping to draw it closer and closer. Every time we reach out to someone in the name of Christ, we tug on the edges of the kingdom, drawing it a little closer to us.

'I am the Alpha and the Omega', says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.

Now to him who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood, and made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

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