

November 25, 2018

Hebrew 2:9

Revelation 14:14-16

St. James Church Logo "Crown"

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The Bible is full of kings and crowns. The Hebrew scriptures: the Old Testament include a time in which Israel wanted human kings, rather than acknowledging and obeying God as king. They put their trust in humans, rather than in God. God warned them, this would lead only to trouble. And it did, and still does!

Then, we encounter kings and crowns in the life and death of Jesus, and in the early Church. The Greek scriptures: the New Testament speaks of the kingdom/reign of God inaugurated by Jesus and moving toward fruition through the work of the Church.

Today, we will look at Jesus' crown of thorns and our crowns. Yes, Jesus wears a crown, and we get to wear one too!

Let' talk about Jesus' crowns. The Bible speaks really of two crowns he will wear. The one he wears as he goes through his trial and crucifixion. It looks like a crown of thorns. Yet, let's not be fooled, God turns it into a crown of glory and honor. In dying and death he wears the first crown. In a time yet to come, he will wear the second crown, the gold one, when he alone will serve as Judge and bring in the entire harvest.

As some of you know, I had a portion of my growing up heavily influenced by evangelicals within Christianity. Thus, my journey is based on my exposure to them and my own natural make-up and wiring which causes me to make commitments

quickly when I am sure, and then dive all in and try and give it my all.

Evangelicals emphasize a need to receive Jesus as Savior and then make him Lord of your life. I still believe those two things are an important part of Christianity, though today, I understand them in a different way.

Jesus' trial and crucifixion are an essential part of our history as Christians. In his trial, he refused to be turned into something he was not. Leaders of his time, felt threatened because he was acquiring a large following, and thus, they viewed him as someone who could usurp them from their throne of power. So, they try and pressure him into saying he is a king, in the same way they see themselves as kings. Yet, Jesus did not comply when the pressure was applied. No, through his resistance and action he declared he was the King of love, not fear, not filled with authoritarian power, but rather, servant leadership. He wore a crown not of gold, but of thorns. They meant it to be humiliating and degrading. Yet, he wore it with honor, because pain, and suffering were the outer garments he wore as he hung on the cross. And, pain and suffering was also his glory!

I remember very clearly the day I made my commitment to Christ – May 7, 1971 (some of us are date and time Christians, and others of us take a period of time, maybe even years before we get to that place of letting him save us from the notions of the world (including who and what is important – like having power, and control). I think taking him, as my Savior was the easy part. He did all the work; all I had to do was receive the unconditional love.

Yet, I discovered a few years after that (3 or 4) that he not only wanted to be my Savior he wanted to be my Lord, as well: King of kings and Lord of lords. So, when I was 17 years old, I dropped my stick in the large bonfire during Christian camp on Saranac Lake and in so doing was saying, "I was willing to let him be Lord of my Life. Little did I know at the time, which I have become convinced at 60, that this, is not a once and done decision, but one that must be made every day and some days several times a day. In essence, to place the crown on his head over and over whenever I knock it off his head ,by acting like all that matters in this world are me and mine.

As King and Lord, he is Sovereign, in control, and I am willing to yield each and every part of me, all of me, to his control, and recognize that he rules over all things, including me, us, our Church. He is both supreme and the greatest. Is he Sovereign, King, Lord, or do we have control issues, thus trusting and even obeying other kings, or having something, someone, somewhere else as our Lord?

And thus, we have the crown in our church logo, to remind us of Christ, our King, our Savior, and our Lord. To declare both what is true and what we hope will be true for each of us, and our church.

Then, there is also the equal truth that not only Jesus wears a crown, but we are meant to wear one too! Now, let's look into how we can cash in on the crown deal. You will get a crown via two avenues: one on how you handle temptations (succeed and you will receive the crown of life). And the other, when the Chief Shepherd (Jesus) appears you will automatically get a crown of glory (no succeeding necessary, you just get the crown which never fades, that's all there is to it)!

With living comes temptations, and those temptations can come from the outside, but the location of the real battle is on the inside of you and me. It's not too complicated, whenever we handle temptation and not give in to it, we feel alive. And, whenever we have temptation and yield to it a part of us dies.

I love that our crown is at the top of the tree of life. And the real truth is, if we eliminate or chop off the crown of a tree, the tree will die.

There is a condition known as crown reduction, where they make sure to not remove more than 20% of the large branches at the top. Which if we discard, we will then make the tree vulnerable and even begin to decline.

Which is similar to the way temptation can affect us. It begins with what we consider a "minor sin" like talking negatively about someone else, then we hack at a larger branch like refusing to forgive a relative, and then we excuse stealing and damaging someone else's reputation and then we oppress those we don't understand or fear or think are taking something from us that is rightfully ours and not theirs. It starts with just a small hack, and then before we know it we have reduced too much of the crown.

If we do not yield to temptation by staying strong in God through prayer and committed to following God's will even when it is hard, and even costly, our tree will have a glorious crown and that crown will be the crown of life. In other words, follow God's ways and will and we will live and thrive. Chose to reduce the crown and you will begin to decline and may even die.

And the last crown we will explore for today is the crown all of us will get because God is gracious and Christ is good and thus we will have a love come to us that will never end. That is your crowning glory according to scripture. Not that we remain loving, but that God remains loving and will not be deterred by anything or anyone when it comes to loving us forever and ever. God is committed to you and me, to us, to all others, and in proving it, tells and shows us that nothing, no nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

So, on this Christ the King Sunday (always the Sunday before Advent begins), let us give glory and honor to the One we choose to crown and who crowns us too.