

“Long Live the King”
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St. Luke’s Episcopal Church – Anchorage, Kentucky
Last Sunday after Pentecost (Christ the King) – 21 & 22 November 2015
John 18:33-37

Americans have a strange and complicated relationship with monarchy. On the one hand, we cherish our liberation from the tyranny of George III. On the other, whenever British royalty visits the United States, people line the streets, excited to catch a glimpse of them. I won’t even mention the profusion of grief over Princess Diana’s death or the diligent curiosity we practice over whether that odd fellow Charles will ascend to the throne, or one of his dashing boys instead. So as we gather to celebrate Christ as King, we feel both repelled and attracted by the concept.

Our initial tendency may be to resist the idea that Jesus is our King. We prefer to think of Jesus as our friend, and since few if any of us consort with royalty, we have trouble thinking of our buddy Jesus as “Your Majesty.” Aren’t we taught that Jesus humbled himself, coming down to Earth in human form, suffering torture and death on a cross? Such humiliation is foreign to our understanding of kingship. We don’t want a Jesus high up on a throne, where we cannot access him. During his life here on Earth, Jesus was very accessible. People could approach him for help with their problems. Kings aren’t like that, so how could Jesus be a king?

However, sometimes we do want a king, somebody to set everything straight. As much as we resist authority, we often rely upon it to simplify complexity, provide assurance, and reduce risk. We appeal to God’s authority to protect and heal, to guide and guard us. We recognize God’s sovereignty as Creator of all that exists, as the sole source of life and light, the fount of salvation. How God operates may mystify us, but there is little doubt that God is active, working out His purposes, striving to orchestrate order out of chaos, so that all may know peace.

Part of our ambivalence arises from the mistaken connections we draw between Jesus as King and the sort of higher-ups we're accustomed to seeing from afar, or reading about in history books. When it comes to describing or comprehending who God is and how God works, we must be careful to avoid the tendency to apply human analogies too literally.

In a way, we suffer from the same problem Pontius Pilate did, who couldn't figure out what it meant for Jesus to be a King, because Jesus didn't behave like any King Pilate had ever heard of. A King, in Pilate's mind, deployed troops to defend his interests. Jesus didn't do that. It simply didn't compute for Pilate.

However, God transcends the imperfections of mortal kingship. Jesus can be both close by us, while at the same time operating at a whole other level that's beyond us. Jesus may appear capricious, making choices we don't like for reasons we cannot fathom, but Jesus is also available to receive our petitions and generous in responding to our needs in ways that are best for us, even though we may not readily perceive the wisdom in how Jesus answers our prayers. And unlike the monarchy of George III, Elizabeth II, or the most common form of monarchy known as Me, Myself, and I the First, the kingship of Jesus suffers no limitations, which is wonderful news for us.

The awareness that God really is in charge offers a sense of security that is unsurpassed. Why scrutinize and agonize over the choices made by a God who has made it clear that God chooses us, has chosen us, from before the beginning of time? Why question the power of a King who has conquered death, and promises the same victory for us? Why resist obedience to a King who has liberated us from the most destructive force imaginable, sin?

The Kingship of Christ may cramp our style a bit. The idea of reverence before God is growing increasingly dim, as people surrender to a highly emotional – bordering on sentimental

– way of relating to God. There’s nothing wrong with engaging how we feel when we seek out and find God, but the exuberance that seems so essential to some may mask a certain shallowness of devotion that can distract us from the true awe elicited when we encounter the Holy.

If we forget that Christ is King, our prayers may sink into a tone resembling impatient calls to an inattentive waiter. For some, the temptations of self-congratulation and the assumption of superiority overcome us, like when we ignore the fact that we may be citizens of a great nation, but that our core identity resides in being subjects of a much greater realm that shows no preference for flag or anthem. But if we bother to remember and believe and embrace the truth of Christ the King, then we receive blessing.

The Kingship of Christ gives us another way to understand a God who exceeds our intellectual and intuitive capacities. And when we remember that God’s monarchy is exercised without the limitations and imperfections of those that have been so oppressive and feeble here on Earth, we recognize that our concern stems from drawing too close a parallel between the pale imitations of mere mortals and our God who transcends them all.

So long live Christ the King, and all creatures hail him, who was and is and is to come, the Mighty One, champion of weak and strong, the ruler who serves, the humble yet glorious Ancient One, who came to dwell among us that we might live in Him. Amen.