

SERMON, NOVEMBER 25, 2018

PROPER 29B – CHRIST THE KING

Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14; Revelation 1:4b-8; John 18:33-37

MOST OF US ARE FASCINATED BY ROYALTY. ALL OF MY GRANDDAUGHTERS WENT THROUGH A TIME OF BEING ENCHANTED WITH FAIRYTALE KINGDOMS. THEY LOVED STORIES THAT INCLUDED A FAIRYTALE PRINCESS AND SPENT COUNTLESS HOURS PLAYING DRESS-UP IMAGINING THEMSELVES AS ROYALTY ADORNED IN FINE CLOTHES AND SPARKLING JEWELS. THEY WERE SURE ROYALTY COULD DO ANYTHING THEY WANTED AND COMMAND OTHERS TO DO AS THEY ORDERED. SOMEHOW THE GIRLS ALWAYS HAD THE PART AS THE PRINCESS AND I WAS THE LOWLY SERVANT GIRL! EVEN AS ADULTS WE HAVE A GREAT INTEREST IN ROYALTY. IF WE TRAVEL TO A COUNTRY THAT HAS A MONARCHY WE JOIN OTHER TOURISTS IN HOPING TO GET A GLIMPSE OF THE KING OR QUEEN, OR EVEN A PRINCE OR PRINCESS. HOW MANY OF US WATCHED THE ROYAL WEDDING OF PRINCE HARRY AND MEGHAN MARKLE AND WERE SWEEPED UP IN THE ELEGANCE AND GRANDEUR OF IT? THE CEREMONY ITSELF, THE SETTING IN ST. GEORGE'S CHAPEL AT WINDSOR CASTLE, THE GORGEOUS FLOWERS, THE BEAUTIFUL DRESSES WERE ALL LIKE A FAIRYTALE COME TRUE. ON THIS SUNDAY OF THE CHURCH YEAR WE PROCLAIM JESUS AS CHRIST, THE KING. THAT'S WHAT THE TITLE CHRIST MEANS. IT'S THE GREEK TRANSLATION OF THE HEBREW WORD FOR MESSIAH WHICH MEANS ANOINTED ONE AND REFERS TO THE ANCIENT RITE OF

ANOINTING A NEW KING. WE TEND TO USE THE WORD CHRIST AS IF IT IS THE LAST NAME OF JESUS BUT IN REALITY IT HIS TITLE – JESUS, THE CHRIST, JESUS, THE KING. WE ALL HAVE OUR IDEAS OF WHAT ROYALTY SHOULD LOOK LIKE AND HOW THEY SHOULD BEHAVE AND ONCE AGAIN JESUS TURNS OUR IDEAS UPSIDE DOWN. THE GOSPELS DO NOT DESCRIBE A KING ROBED IN ROYAL CLOTHING, OF SILK OR VELVET, SITTING ON AN ELEGANT THRONE. NO, WE GET A COMPLETELY DIFFERENT IMAGE. THIS KING WAS NOT BORN WITH A SILVER SPOON IN HIS MOUTH. HE WAS BORN IN A STABLE AND LAID IN A SIMPLE MANGER WITH THE PUNGENT SMELL OF ANIMALS FILLING THE AIR. HIS LIFE WAS NOT ONE OF PRIVILEGE. HE LED A SIMPLE LIFE AS AN ITINERANT TEACHER, WHO LIVED WITH COMPASSION REACHING OUT TO THOSE IN NEED AND RELIEVING THEIR PAIN. HE WAS NOT POPULAR WITH THE POWERFUL. ALTHOUGH HE DID NOT ADVOCATE FOR VIOLENCE OR REVOLUTION, HE DID OPENLY CRITICIZE THE GOVERNMENT AND THE RELIGIOUS SYSTEMS OF HIS DAY FOR THE OPPRESSION AND INJUSTICE THEY INFLICTED ON PEOPLE. JESUS HELD UP A DIFFERENT KIND OF POWER – THE POWER OF LOVE. IN TODAY'S GOSPEL WE SEE JESUS, APPEARING TO BE POWERLESS AND VULNERABLE, STANDING BEFORE THE RUTHLESS AND POWERFUL RULER, PILATE. PILATE AND JESUS REPRESENT TWO KINDS OF POWER, TWO KINDS OF KINGDOMS. WE KNOW THE OUTCOME OF THIS ENCOUNTER. JESUS WAS NAILED TO A CROSS, NAKED AND REJECTED, WITH A SIGN OVER HIS HEAD SAYING, "THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS", WHICH WAS MEANT TO BE A MOCKERY, A TAUNT TO RIDICULE HIM. JESUS FREELY SUBMITTED TO THE

INDIGNITIES OF CRUCIFIXION TO MANIFEST DIVINE LOVE. IN FACT, HIS ENTIRE LIFE WAS A MANIFESTATION OF DIVINE LOVE. IF WE WANT TO KNOW WHAT GOD IS LIKE, LOOK AT JESUS, STUDY HIS LIFE, SEE HOW HE LIVED AND LOVED. HIS LIFE CAME TO A CLIMAX ON THE CROSS WHERE HE GAVE THE ULTIMATE GIFT IN THE NAME OF LOVE. AND IN THAT GIVING THERE WAS POWER – POWER TO DEFEAT DEATH AND EVIL AND GIVE US NEW LIFE HERE AND NOW AND ETERNAL LIFE WITH GOD. IN HIM THE PROMISE OF GOD WAS FULFILLED. SO JESUS IS A DIFFERENT KIND OF KING. WHAT DOES HIS KINGDOM LOOK LIKE? WHAT DID JESUS MEAN WHEN HE SAID THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS AT HAND, HAS COME NEAR, IS IN OUR MIDST? JESUS DID NOT GIVE A DEFINITIVE DESCRIPTION OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD BUT IT WAS A CENTRAL THEME OF HIS TEACHING PARABLES. HE TOLD THESE STORIES HEAVING IMAGE UPON IMAGE. THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS LIKE A MUSTARD SEED, LIKE A PERSON SOWING SEED, LIKE LEAVEN, LIKE HIDDEN TREASURE, LIKE A FISH NET, AND ON AND ON. PHILLIP YANCY SAYS THAT FROM THESE STORIES WE LEARN THAT THE KINGDOM OF GOD “COMES WITH A RESISTABLE POWER. IT IS HUMBLE AND UNOBTRUSIVE AND COEXISTENT WITH EVIL . . .AGAINST ALL ODDS, GOD'S KINGDOM WILL GROW AND SPREAD THROUGHOUT THE WORLD BRINGING RELIEF TO THE SICK, THE POOR, THE IMPRISONED, THE UNLOVED.” YANCY GOES ON TO SAY THAT, “CLEARLY THE KINGDOM OF GOD OPERATES BY A SET OF RULES DIFFERENT FROM ANY EARTHLY KINGDOM'S. GOD'S KINGDOM HAS NO GEOGRAPHICAL BORDERS, NO CAPITAL CITY, NO PARLIAMENT BUILDING, NO ROYAL TRAPPINGS THAT YOU CAN SEE.” YANCY

REMINDS US THAT WE “POSSESS A KIND OF DUAL CITIZENSHIP. WE LIVE IN AN EXTERNAL KINGDOM OF FAMILY AND CITIES AND NATIONHOOD, WHILE AT THE SAME TIME BELONGING TO THE KINGDOM OF GOD.” ARCHBISHOP TUTU SAYS THAT IN GOD'S KINGDOM WE ARE NOT OUR BROTHER AND SISTER'S KEEPERS. NO, INSTEAD WE ARE OUR BROTHER'S BROTHER OUR SISTER'S SISTER. ALL OF THE PEOPLE OF THE WORLD ARE SIBLINGS, ONE FAMILY, BECAUSE WE ARE ALL GOD'S CHILDREN. OUR LOVE IS MEANT TO EXTEND TO ALL PEOPLE – PEOPLE BEYOND OUR FAMILY, BEYOND OUR PARISH, BEYOND OUR LOCAL COMMUNITIES, BEYOND OUR COUNTRY, AND TO MINISTER NOT JUST TO THE IMMEDIATE NEEDS, AS IMPORTANT AS THAT IS, BUT ALSO TO ADDRESS THE UNDERLYING CAUSES THAT MAKE THESE MINISTRIES NECESSARY. WE NEED TO ASK WHY ARE PEOPLE POOR AND HUNGRY AND POORLY EDUCATED AND UNDER EMPLOYED AND SUFFERING FROM ADDICTIONS? AND THEN DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT. IN GOD'S KINGDOM, TO QUOTE VERNA DOZIER, “EVERYBODY WILL BE LOVED AND RESPECTED, NOT BECAUSE OF EDUCATION OR WEALTH OR ANCESTRY OR AUTHORITY OR RANK OR VIRTUE OR ACHIEVEMENTS, BUT BECAUSE EACH HUMAN BEING IS CREATED BY GOD AND LOVED BY GOD.” SHE TELLS US THAT “THE CALL TO MINISTRY IS THE CALL TO BE A CITIZEN OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD IN A NEW WAY, THE DARING, FREE, ACCEPTING, COMPASSIONATE WAY JESUS MODELED. IT MEANS BEING BOUND BY NO YESTERDAY, FEARING NO TOMORROW, DRAWING NO LINES BETWEEN FRIEND AND FOE, THE ACCEPTABLE ONES AND THE OUTCASTS. MINISTRY IS COMMITMENT TO THE DREAM OF GOD.” JESUS TAUGHT THAT THE KINGDOM

OF GOD IS PRESENT NOW AND YET TO COME. GOD'S DREAM IS NOT YET FULFILLED, BUT WE DO GET GLIMPSES OF IT. THIS PAST FRIDAY CBS NEWS HAD A STORY ABOUT JARED HUCKS WHO OWNS THE MIDTOWN MOTEL IN MYRTLE BEACH, SOUTH CAROLINA. HIS MOTEL REMAINED OPEN DURING HURRICANE FLORENCE AND THE SUBSEQUENT FLOODING. HE HAS GIVEN 1,000 NIGHTS OF FREE LODGING TO "THE POOREST AND MOST VULNERABLE EVACUEES", TOTALING ABOUT \$50,000 IN GOODS AND SERVICES. WHEN ASKED WHAT PROMPTED HIM TO DO THIS JARED RESPONDED, "LOVE THY NEIGHBOR." HIS GENEROSITY HAS INSPIRED OTHERS TO ASSIST HIS EFFORTS WITH GIFTS OF CASH, DIAPERS, ICE, AND FOOD. HIS GUESTS ARE GIVEN THREE MEALS A DAY, ASSISTANCE WITH CAR REPAIRS, DEPOSITS FOR APARTMENTS, AND WHATEVER ELSE THEY MIGHT NEED. PEOPLE'S NEEDS ARE BEING PROVIDED FOR FROM NEW SHOES TO HAIR CUTS, FROM HEAD TO TOE. AND AS A BONUS, THE MOTEL HAS A POOL, AND THE CHILDREN HAPPILY PLAY AND SWIM IN IT. THE NEEDS OF THESE EVACUEES ARE BEING MET WITH ABUNDANCE. THAT'S GOD'S KINGDOM. THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS PRESENT IN OUR MIDST IN OUR COMMUNITY WHEN WE WORK TO ALLEVIATE HUNGER THROUGH PADS AND FEED MY STARVING CHILDREN. GOD'S KINGDOM WILL BE EXPERIENCED WHEN THE CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES SPONSORED BY CARING 4 KIDS RECEIVE THE GIFTS FROM OUR GIVING TREE. GOD'S DREAM OF CARE AND COMPASSION IS BEING FULFILLED WHEN WE REACH OUT TO ONE ANOTHER IN TIMES OF ILLNESS AND GRIEF OR EXTEND A HELPING HAND IN A TIME OF NEED. GOD'S KINGDOM IS PRESENT WHEN YOU SPEAK UP AND STAND UP AGAINST

INJUSTICE AND DISCRIMINATION WHETHER IT BE AT WORK OR SCHOOL OR IN THE PUBLIC ARENA. GOD'S DREAM IS BEING MADE REAL WHEN WE RESIST VIOLENCE AND ANGRY RHETORIC THAT POLARIZES PEOPLE INTO HATEFUL FACTIONS. ARCHBISHOP TUTU PROCLAIMS THAT "ALL OVER THIS MAGNIFICENT WORLD GOD CALLS US TO EXTEND GOD'S KINGDOM OF SHALOM – WHICH MEANS PEACE AND WHOLENESS – OF JUSTICE, OF GOODNESS, OF COMPASSION, OF CARING, OF SHARING, OF LAUGHTER, OF JOY AND OF RECONCILIATION. GOD IS TRANSFIGURING THE WORLD THIS VERY MOMENT THROUGH US BECAUSE GOD BELIEVES IN US AND LOVES US."

JESUS IS A KING LIKE NO OTHER KING. HERE IS A KING WHO CAME NOT TO BE SERVED, BUT TO SERVE. HERE IS A KING WHO DESIRES TO FORGIVE HIS ENEMIES RATHER THAN PUNISH THEM. HERE IS A KING WHOSE POWER TO SAVE REACHES EVEN TO DEATH, DESTROYING DEATH TO BRING US LIFE. IN JESUS, WE HAVE BEEN INVITED TO COME CLOSE TO GOD AND LIVE IN GOD'S PRESENCE TODAY. LET US WITH BOLDNESS PROCLAIM THAT HE IS THE ALPHA AND THE OMEGA, THE BEGINNING AND THE END, "WHO IS AND WHO WAS AND WHO IS TO COME, THE ALMIGHTY." BUT LET US NOT STOP WITH AWE AND WORSHIP. LET US FOLLOW IN THE WAY OF JESUS AND WORK TO BRING GOD'S DREAM TO FULFILLMENT.

AMEN. SO BE IT!