

**Imagine a King**  
**November 22, 2009**  
**John 18:33 - 37**

Today is Christ the King Sunday; the last Sunday of the liturgical calendar. Our alter linens have been changed to white and we find ourselves looking towards the beginning of a new liturgical year; one marked by a season of celebration and anticipation not only for the birth of Christ, but also the anticipation of his second coming. Next week begins the advent season and as we prepare ourselves to look ahead, let's take just a moment to look back at another beginning we have experienced together.

Thirty four weeks ago today we met for the first time as a community of faith and made a promise to one another to encourage those that find their way here to New Day and we have covenanted with one another to be a place of hope, love and acceptance not just for those who "fit the mold" so to speak, but for all of God's creation who are seeking a reconciled, renewed relationship with their God and their Creator. We have met many who have been marginalized and disenfranchised during their lives by those who once were closest to them and we have done our best to remind each of them that they are loved not only by this community of faith, but by their God. Man may segregate and categorize, but our God does not. We are reminded of our belief in this each Sunday as we read on our announcements and prayer list the phrase, "One God, One Love." So once again this Sunday, as we transition between liturgical seasons let me remind each of you here this morning that you are all loved, welcomed and sought after by a mighty, all powerful, loving and merciful God! Please don't miss the opportunity to meet him in this place today.

Before continuing this morning, let's take just a moment to go before our God in prayer. Let us pray. O Lord, breathe into us your living word, your guiding spirit, and your

peace giving presence. Speak, we pray, by the words of my lips and in the meditations of our hearts. Touch us for your servants are open to your leading. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen

In our time together, in reading God's word and in our Tuesday Together group, as well as in individual discussions, it has come to my attention that though we all worship and serve the same one true God, how each of us has come to perceive God can be radically different. This is where our scripture reading comes into play this morning. When you imagine God, when you think of Jesus, what image or metaphor do you come up with? We have talked many times during our Tuesday Together meetings about the imagery of God and have occasionally referred to the need for such imagery during our time on Sunday. So close your eyes for just a moment as again I ask you, when you think of God, what comes to mind. (pause) You may open your eyes.

Maybe your imagery of God is dependent upon which part of the triune experience you find yourself referring to; maybe you relate best to God as Creator the all powerful author and designer of the world in which we live, or maybe you identify best with Jesus Christ as Redeemer; God made flesh who walked on the earth and experienced all of the same trials and temptations that you and I face in our own daily lives. Or maybe it's the Holy Spirit as Sustainer that calls you into relationship each day; a sweet reminder of the hope and presence of God that remains in this world today. Since there are many avenues we can take, why don't we, in honor of Christ the King Sunday, limit our thoughts and discussion for just a moment to Jesus. He has after all, been the main topic of our Sunday teachings since we began this journey together and we have seen him portrayed in many respects. We have seen Jesus as a teacher; a friend; and a brother; a relationship we saw elevated to its highest level as the gospels reminded us that Jesus called Thomas, Didymus, or Twin. The gospels also tell us that Jesus referred to himself as

many things; I am the living bread (John 6:51); I am from above (John 8:23); I am the light of the world (John 8:12); I am the door (John 10:11); I am the good shepherd (John 10:11); I am the Son of God (John 10:26); I am the resurrection and the life (John 11:25); I am the way, the truth and the life (John 14:6); I am the true vine (John 15:1) and in today's reading we hear a slightly different, more compelling self imagery offered by Jesus when he responds to Pilate with, "You are right in saying that I am a king . . ." (John 18:37)

If I were to have asked each of you hear today to write down your own imagery of Christ this morning I would venture to say that two things would have been true: (1) most everyone would have had a differing imagery of Christ and (2) the least common would have been of Christ as a King. Yet today we celebrate Christ the King Sunday. Why not Christ the living bread Sunday or Christ the Shepherd Sunday?

Recall from our scripture reading today that it is for claiming to be a "king" that Jesus is brought before Pilate. Though Jesus makes it quite clear to Pilate that his kingship is not from this world and that his kingdom does not function like the kingdoms of this world; for political reasons Pilate ultimately condemns Jesus to death and places over his head a reminder of the charge brought against him; the charge that Jesus had claimed to be the King of the Jews; which incidentally is a charge that Jesus never denied.

So, just what is a "king?" Experiences from our childhood may conjure up images of fairy-tale kings like those of Camelot and Nottingham. Or maybe we think of it as a struggle for power like when we would play the game, "King of the Hill," the game where the strongest pushes everyone else off the hill. I would endeavor to say that regardless of our idea of King, most would agree that the word has something to do with power, prestige and authority; an attitude that Jesus had already warned James and John, as well as the other disciples about during

the few weeks prior to this event. So what did Jesus mean by “king.” Why is it that this same Jesus who had offered so many imageries about himself and had taught so much about the need for radical inclusivity would now, at this time, offer up an imagery that was so exclusive?

Remember that it is not always easy to see the Kingdom of God. When we think of Jesus, our favorite image of him, in lieu of Sundays like this one in the church year, is not likely to be that of Jesus as King, more likely it is Jesus as shepherd, Jesus as a teacher or Jesus sitting with the children gathered around him. And when we do declare Jesus is King, when we do declare that he is the Messiah, the chosen one of God, I think we have a hard time wrapping our mind around what it is we are truly confessing.

Just as with our childhood understanding of what it means to be a king, so we also find ourselves today encapsulated by the imagery of a King as a person who issues commands that others are suppose to obey; Kings are people that their subjects are to be loyal to and to whom they are supposed to serve; regardless of how they feel about it and without choice. And so in a world whose theology and doctrine teaches us to be more like Jesus and to ask the question, “What would Jesus do,” we find ourselves caught in a quandary, if you will. How are we supposed to serve, encourage and love one another if we find ourselves engrossed in the imagery of king?

I think we see the damaging affects of this type of imagery in its purest form amongst those churches and church leaders who preach legalism and secular obedience, rather than relationship and accountability. If I imagine my responsibility as a child of God to be more like Jesus as a King, then it would be very easy for me to begin to see myself as above or better than others. This is where marginalization not only in our society, but in our church begins to manifest itself. To look beyond the radically inclusive teachings of Christ to a theology that

more closely resembles Mosaic Law rather than relationship and transformation is to completely miss out on the good news that Jesus was sent to bring. The good news that teaches us not only about the need and ability of those around us to be transformed, but also about the need and ability for transformation to occur within ourselves; this is the good news that is reflective of the love that God has for each of us.

So, when we imagine Jesus as our friend, as our shepherd, as our brother, as one who has come to heal us and to accentuate in our minds the love and the grace and the goodness that he had for the people of Israel and has for us today, it makes Jesus “user friendly.” It makes Jesus first among equals. And so Jesus is. Jesus states to Pilate that his kingdom is not of this world and that, in effect, his kingship is not like that of the kings of this world. As our King, Jesus is not in our face. He gives us our freedom. He treats us as equals; he treats us as his friends. This is what Jesus meant by his Kingship is not like that of the kingships of this world. But Pilate, having settled with himself that Jesus posed no real threat (politically) to his Kingdom, could not hear the words of Jesus and understand what he was saying to him.

Now, don't get me wrong. I'm not saying that Jesus isn't Lord and that he isn't to be perceived with authority . . . to do so would belittle the very of hierarchy of our relationship with God. What I am saying is that we should not displace our understanding of his authority in our lives into our relationship with others. In all of our metaphors and imageries of Christ, let's not lose track of the fact that doing what he wants us to do really might be good for us and that not doing what he wants us to do may not be so good for us. There are some who believe that obedience is not the essence of the Christian faith. I disagree; however, I also want to clarify that statement with this.

Obedience is not about your obedience to me or my obedience to you. It is, however, about our obedience to God our Creator, Jesus Christ our Redeemer and the Holy Spirit our Sustainer. The unconditional love of God comes to us because of obedience and is reflective of obedience that Christ showed for his father when despite his desire to have the cup taken from him; he still made his way to the cross and he did so for you and for me and for all who come seeking reconciliation and relationship with their Creator. Our faith is indeed based in relationship - a relationship of love. But obedience really does seem to be a part of what we should be about.

This morning I believe we can all agree that Jesus redefined what Kingship is all about. While we can agree today that his kingship is not in fact from this world or like that of the kingships of this world there is still in fact some measure of power that we should ascribe to Jesus; a power over our lives. As a reflection of our new found life in Christ, we must also exert this same power in our lives, not a power of coercion of others but of respect and love; a respect and love that has as its fruit a willing obedience to God in all areas of our lives.

Can we imagine Jesus as a king? And does our image of Jesus as king extend to making him Lord over something as simple as our plumbing, whether that plumbing be that within our kitchen or within our bodies? Do we ever bother asking Jesus about the little things that happen each day? Do we seek his help in all that we do? Do we ever genuinely ask the question, "what would Jesus do," or it is just something we wear for show. How much of our Christianity is for show and how much of it do we practice in our daily lives? Our answers to these questions speak to the very heart of the Kingdom of God language that Jesus uses in our scripture reading today.

Sometimes being faithful is a difficult thing. Sometimes loving someone or being dedicated to them means doing things we do not want to do, a kind of tough love approach, but when we trust in God and believe that he will be faithful to us when we try to do what is right -- then, as Jesus says over and over again in the gospels, the Kingdom of God is not far from us; indeed it is at hand; it is over us and within us.

As you go forth today I ask that you take some time this week to look again at your imagery of Christ; to look at your relationship with him and to seek understanding of his will and purpose in your life. Don't be afraid to ask for help in the little things in life; it will make the major challenges we encounter seem that much more able to be overcome. Also, as you give thanks this Thursday as you are gathered with family and friends for the holidays, be sure to give thanks for this community of faith and for those who do so much to serve here each week. Whether it be through your time, talents, offerings or prayers; know that each of you are appreciated. Know that as I gather with my family and friends this week, I will be giving thanks for each of you. You have each become an important part of my life journey and I love you all so dearly. Blessed be the name of Jesus - he who is our friend, our brother, our shepherd, our Lord, and our King, now and evermore. Amen