

Wounded King

A Sermon for Christ the King,
Year B – John 18:

Slide: Royal Weddings

Even though we do not have an established monarchy in this country, it seems we do have a fascination with royalty. One need only look at the affect the death of Princess Diana had upon this whole country. People watched her get married on national television as she stumbled over the name of her husband to be Prince Charles. People followed her scandalous divorce and her love for certain charities. And people witnessed her sudden death in a car accident. As millions watched the marriage of a princess, they also watched the funeral of one. And, most recently never was there a larger audience of people to watch the weddings of Princess Diana and Prince Charles' two children.

And, even the fascination we have with princesses as we see from Walt Disney but also on Netflix with Christmas movies about ordinary people

falling in love with royalty, royalty who, by the way, turn out to have good hearts and the best for their people in mind...of course. In a way, Americans are not only fascinated by royalty, we idealize it in a very interesting way.

While as we may not truly understand the concepts of modern day monarchy in England or even in Saudi Arabia, we do know the concept of what it is to be a ruler, a king, a queen, and a monarch. We know, because we are witnesses to all of human history, and in a way, even our democracy has elements of kingship bound within it, because it is natural for human beings to desire autonomous and complete authority, even within a democracy, even while we are also repelled and opposed to a leader who is simply a leader because they are born in that position.

Slide: Christ the King

Today we celebrate the day in the church year that is called Christ the King. Some

churches are now calling it the Reign of Christ Sunday to avoid the patriarchal language of kingship, but still, we know this as the day we celebrate Christ as the only sovereign there is.

This Sunday is also the final Sunday of the church calendar, which does not follow the yearly calendar; nor the financial calendar, but the church year follows its own calendar, beginning with Advent and ending with Christ the King Sunday.

Slide: Crown of Thorns

The history of this day is interesting. This Sunday of Christ the King is a relatively new what we call a feast day celebration. What is a feast day? A feast day is a day that is celebrated on the same day or time each year. So, other examples of feast days would be say...Christmas, Easter, the Day of Epiphany, or Pentecost Sunday. This is why we go from green banners to white today and by next week, will be changed to the time of Advent. But, this feast day, Christ the King Sunday is not an old feast

day like Christmas. It was created by Pope Pius in the 1920's as a reaction against colonialism and nationalism.

The height of colonialism culminated in the First World War, which we remember began 100 years ago. There was desire by the church to rebuke the effects of the nationalism. Church leaders of the day were concerned about the power that monarchies displayed throughout the world, so much so that they found it necessary to remind especially those of Christian nations that there is only one king in the person of Jesus Christ.

Furthermore, there was a desire also to remind the world that this king, this one, true monarch of the universe was not the kind of king that displayed power with armies, fearful might, assimilation and war. No, this king, the Christ, made it of special significance to show his power in the opposite way for which a king usually rules. This king instead chooses humility, service, and wounding. This is a scarred king.

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It is ironic to think that the mightiest King would be a humbled one, so much so that we would naturally not attribute him to be a king in the first place. Yet, in Luke's Gospel, Jesus is pictured as a king even before he is born.

When the angel Gabriel tells Mary that she is to bear a son named Jesus, the angel says: "The Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

Then, in Matthew's gospel, the wise magi from the East, in their desire to bring gifts and pay homage, ask King Herod, who was the supposed rightful king at that time, "Where is he who has been born King of the Jews?"

And, in Mark's gospel, Jesus begins his public ministry by saying quite simply: "The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God has come near." Then, when Jesus enters Jerusalem before his death, he

enters the city on a humble donkey, a sign of reconciliation and peace that would have been used by the kings of that day. Lastly, we hear in today's gospel lesson Jesus proclaim that his "kingdom is not from this world," describing for us all that our version of a kingdom is not God's version of one.

Slide: Pilate and Jesus

Whenever I read this Gospel reading from John, I always marvel at this conversation Jesus has with Pilate. Here Pilate, who is living in yet another empire that valued power and domination, would have thought Jesus rather pitiable to speak about a kingdom not of this world. In our world, Jesus doesn't look so strong here. He appears submissive and defeated, destined to die and it clearly bothers Pilate.

Don't you think that Pilate would have thought Jesus mad? Certainly if Jesus really were a king, things would look different? Would there not be force, power, war, possession of wealth and

dominance? The truth of the matter is, unlike any ruler on earth, unlike any king, queen, president, prime minister, or dictator; Jesus was and is to this day the only one who was truly unique in his kingship. His is a kingship like none other...period.

Slide: The Servant King

First, Jesus is a servant king. Jesus was and is not a king who rules through power, greed, and manipulation at the expense of others. He does not rule with an agenda to cut taxes, increase taxes, or decide who profits from the laws that are passed. He did not conscript any army to dominate the minds and hearts of people by force. He lived and exemplified a far different model of leadership.

Jesus' reign as a king is revealed instead in humility, self-emptying sacrifice, and service to the neighbor. Now, I think that according to the world's standards, Jesus is a very odd, very strange sort of king, one who serves, heals, and teaches us as we follow him.

Slide: Scars

And besides being a servant, Christ is also a king who is scarred. We see this in scripture when Jesus appears to his disciples after his resurrection. He continues to have the scars of his horrific death. They are not magically gone. They remain. Jesus clearly continues to carry within him the reminder of why he died, eternally wounded. Politically, this makes no sense. Charles Colson, who was the founder of Christian Prison Fellowship and also the former legal counsel for President Richard Nixon, once had this to say about that: "All the kings and queens I have known in history sent their people out to die for them. I only know of one king who decided to die for *his* people."

These scars and wounds continue to remain upon our King Jesus Christ. And, because they do, they also become ours. As Paul wrote in his letter to the Corinthians: "We always carry in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be

revealed in our body.” The marks of a king are also the marks of us, when at baptism; we receive the same wounds as our true king does, when they are traced upon our foreheads.

The kingship of Christ, the sovereign reign of our Lord, turns inside out any of the concepts we have about kingship...and leadership for that matter, today. We ought not to strive to look for leaders who will lord it over us, who lead with their own agendas, greed or malice. It would behoove us to remember this, that God’s idea of power, glory, and might, is not always if not ever the way we would perceive power, glory, and might to be.

Slide: baby in manger

Instead, God’s power, glory and might come as a wounded king, who came by way of a lowly stable, who ruled as a shepherd, and whose crown was a ring of thorns. Knowing this, may we give all honor, power, and glory to this Lord of all. Amen.