

The Future King
November 21, 2010
Christ the King Sunday

Our Old Testament text comes from the book of Jeremiah. Jeremiah was a prophet during the time of the exile in the Southern Kingdom. If you remember all of Israel was under one leader King David. When he died, there was a faction in who should be the next leader – one group (the North) thought it was time to give an outsider a try while the other group (the South) wanted to obey God's call for the leader to be from David's lineage. So as all good and faithful people – they split over their differences into the Northern and the Southern Kingdom. The Northern Kingdom survived for a while but a series of unfortunate kings made them weak...and they were taken over by the Assyrians. The Southern Kingdom survived a bit longer but they too had a bad run with Kings and then they were exiled by the Babylonians. To be exiled means the Israelites were sent far away from their homes, their place of worship, and most of their family – all to ensure they could not join forces with others and revolt against the Babylonians. They are in a place that feels utterly powerless. It is to these Israelites of the fallen Southern Kingdom that Jeremiah shares God's message.

Jeremiah 23:1-6

- 1 Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture!
Says the Lord.
- 2 Therefore thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, concerning the shepherds who shepherd my people; It is you who have scattered my flock, and have driven them away, and you have not attended to them. So I will attend to you for your evil doings, says the Lord.
- 3 Then I myself will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the lands where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply.
- 4 I will raise up shepherds over them who will shepherd them, and they shall not fear any longer, or be dismayed, nor shall any be missing, says the Lord.
- 5 The days are surely coming, says the lord, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely. And shall execute justice and righteousness in the land,
- 6 In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. And this is the name by which he will be called: "The Lord is our righteousness."

Luke 23:33-43

- 33 When they came to the place that is called the Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left.

- 34 [[Then Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.’]] And they cast lots to divide his clothing.
- 35 And the people stood by, watching; but the leaders scoffed at him, saying, “He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!”
- 36 The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine,
- 37 And saying, “If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!”
- 38 There was also an inscription over him, “This is the King of the Jews.”
- 39 One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him (Jesus) saying, “Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!”
- 40 But the other rebuked him, saying, “Do you not fear god, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?
- 41 And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong.”
- 42 Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”
- 43 He (Jesus) replied, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.

If you’ve turned on the TV this week – opened a newspaper – turned on your computer – checked out any Face book status updates – looked at the magazines as you checked out at the store or even just paid a bit of attention to any number of conversations in any number of public places – no doubt you have heard the news. William and Kate are FINALLY getting married. Now for those of you who just may not be in the loop – let me tell you I am talking about the future King of England...Prince William and his long time girlfriend Kate Middleton. While it does not consume my life, I will admit that I do pay attention when the royals are in the news....after all the Princes are named William and Harry and one of them even has gorgeous red hair! And judging by the media frenzy this announcement has set off....I don’t think I am alone in my fascination. The Today Show aired it as “Breaking News” on Tuesday morning and now one of their top reporters (along with almost all other networks’ top reporters) is in England waiting to report the details of their wedding plans as they unfold. Perhaps it is the romantic ideal of the “happily ever after” we associate with the Future King and Queen...maybe it is the costumes – the crowns, the jewels, and the carriages we anticipate seeing...maybe it is the royal guards dressed in their brightest red and their black furry hats ...whatever it is we seem to pay attention when people talk about “the royals”... especially the one who it is much anticipated will be the future King.

Today’s Scripture texts are all about kings...probably because it is Christ the King Sunday. This festival day is set aside for the church to loudly proclaim that Jesus Christ is King of all. The church declares that it does not give allegiance to any other person, principality, or power claiming to be sovereign. ⁱ Roughly said, it is the Sunday set aside to remind Christians that Jesus is Lord of all – all the world, all people, all creation – and demands our allegiance.

The idea of Christ as King may be difficult to see...especially when our understanding of Kings either takes on the figurehead pageantry as seems to be the case with England's royals...or, as we have seen throughout history, we understand Kings to be power hungry, self serving, diabolical and above all VERY untrustworthy. History is full of kings who have used their military might to slaughter innocent people in order to get a bigger kingdom; History is full of kings who have abused their power to secure and keep great wealth at the detriment of others. And especially after that whole American Revolution and our founding fathers (and mothers and children) fleeing the monarchy of King George, we must be honest that our view of kings is anything but positive. Especially when we are being asked to give our allegiance to something that appears to go so against what we believe to be true. But allegiance to Christ the King carries a whole other understanding...

Using the Near Eastern custom of framing kings in shepherd language, Jeremiah speaks of the good qualities of a king. By using the shepherd language we see the more pastoral and compassionate nature of the type of King God is calling us to follow. This king gathers and keeps track of all of their people; cares for them and ensures their needs; and leads them in the ways of peace and justice. It is a king with these qualities that God has promised to send to those in exile and this king will rule with wisdom and safety; with justice and righteousness.

The NT text continues the theme of kings but in Luke we find Jesus being crucified for exhibiting some of the very traits Jeremiah prophesied about their new king. In between the mocking and taunting of these final few moments of Jesus' earthly life, we can't help but flash back on the life of justice and mercy that this King lived.

David Lose, the Preaching Chair at Luther Seminary, believes we must look to Christ's ministry to get a clearer picture of the Kingship of Jesus Christ... "...we get a glimpse of the kind of king Christ will be in the story of the audaciously, even offensively generous employer who defies all conceptions of fair play by paying both those who have been working all day and those who labored just a few hours the same. We get some sense of shape of how relationships will operate in the tale of the father who humiliates himself again and again by running after both his wayward and legalistic sons. We get a hint of what will be expected of us in the story about the wounded man overlooked by the best and brightest only to be tended by the despised foreigner."ⁱⁱ

We get an idea of the pastoral nature of this king when we look at the end of Jesus' earthly life and witness his forgiving words of salvation and life to a guilty sinner hanging next to him.

Yes, this King will usher in a whole new kingdom and way of looking at how we treat one another...and on Christ the King Sunday we celebrate this new

understanding of king...and are asked to pledge our allegiance to him. Great! I am all in! I claim Jesus not just as my Lord but also as THE Lord. Come to think of it...I claim this every week. Every Sunday I come here and worship God – sharing in the words of the community, the prayers of the community, even the affirmations of God's presence in our lives. Just by being here every week we this ...don't we? Maybe the answer doesn't lie here in worship on Sunday mornings...

In his sermon, Jesus Christ is Lord! So what?, Rev. Ralph Blair writes, "How on earth can we be confronted with the claim that Jesus Christ is Lord and then go on as if nothing's been said? That all-encompassing affirmation sits there like a most inconvenient elephant in our midst and cannot be ignored. By definition, it demands action. Ohhhhh – there it is.

Claiming Christ as our King means Christ is King over every single aspect of our lives...not just our religious life. It means that Christ is King at school ... do we sit with the person who eats lunch all by themselves because they are "strange"? Or better yet, do we invite them to join us with our friends knowing that action may not be the easiest or most popular decision?

It means Christ is King when we shop ... do we pay attention to how the items we purchased are manufactured – do they come from farms that hurt the environment? Are those who manufactured the garment paid and treated fairly?

It means Christ is King when we walk down the street and are approached by someone who appears homeless...do we find ourselves irritated and frustrated that this person is interrupting our day? Do we find ourselves assuming this person is going to ask for money when in reality he is looking for directions? Do we assume this person is a lowlife who is working the system...rather than take the time to hear his story full of pain and sadness?

It means Christ is King wherever we are...and that claim should affect each and every decision we make.

Take the actions of Perry Reese. Berlin, Ohio is largely an Amish and Mennonite community. And they LOVE their basketball. So they hired themselves a ringer – a great coach loved by all with a winning track record and strong head for turning teams around. They LOVED everything about him – except that he hired an assistant – a young, single, black, Catholic man. The ONLY black man in their county! And lo and behold if that beloved head coach didn't up and quit the very next season...and only days before the beginning of the season thus ensuring that young, single, black, Catholic man – the only black in their county – the man the town decided not to like became their new head coach. The community was furious! They felt tricked and outsmarted into having to keep the assistant – this Perry Reese – as their coach.

And it was ugly at first – parents were highly upset that this man with the wrong color skin and the wrong religion was leading their children. Boosters set Perry up to fail even buying off the local law enforcement so that he would be arrested for minor traffic violations. Perry often received threatening phone calls, angry mail and suffered much vandalism.... Perry met their anger and frustration with dignity and kindness. Now he did call them on the times they were being unfair but he always did it respectfully and directly and with unwavering kindness. And slowly, the townspeople begin to turn their impressions around. When a difficult student with a troubled home life ran into legal trouble, it was coach to take him into his home for 4 months. Perry's work ethic mimicked the hard working Amish/Mennonite community in which he worked and the basketball team – well, they flourished and people started coming extra early just so they could get a seat in the gym. Soon he had Mennonites and Amish and Christians playing on the same team – a big feat considering their rules for interaction and their history of ugliness in the town.

Coach Perry Reese slowly became an active and well loved part of that community. He was a man of quiet faith who mandated the Lord's Prayer before every game. He challenged his players to give back to those in the community and made a point of taking his players to each others churches to learn about the others faiths. He opened the eyes of the whole community by modeling a life of compassion, of justice, of righteousness. If anyone in the town had any right to be angry...it was Coach. But he loved that community into loving each other.

Then one day, 17 years after he became the coach in that small town, Doctors discovered the tumor. An inoperable brain tumor that 6 months later took his life. The entire community showed up for his funeral – Mennonites, Catholics, Amish, and even Baptists showed up. It was a religious melting pot of people all present to celebrate coach. Recognizing the pastoral need of the community, the Catholic priest – Perry's priest – defied Catholic doctrine and opened the communion table to all...and because all were there to pay homage to a man who taught them that the ways of this world are always trumped by the ways of another...they came up and took it regardless of their religious affiliation....all because of a Coach who lived his life under the claim of Christ as King.ⁱⁱⁱ

On this Sunday when we celebrate Christ the King – we remember that the king we follow and the king we claim is not the type of King most of the world sees. This King calls us to welcome all of God's people regardless of social status, gender, race, or religion; This king calls us to make sure all people have full bellies, adequate medical care and someone who loves them; This king calls us to make sure we exhaust every possible peaceful option; This is a king who calls us to follow his ways of compassion, and justice, and mercy, and righteousness, and goodness...even when others in the world are telling us he is anything but. By claiming allegiance to this King – we are claiming a way of life that runs counter to our world...but thanks to a King who loves us far more than

we deserve...we are able to persevere and show forth Christ is King...today...tomorrow...and always.
In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Amen.

ⁱ Perry, Pete. Feasting on the Word: vol 4 year b: Proper 29 (Reign of Christ). WJK Press, Louisville, KY. p335.

ⁱⁱ Lose, David. Christ the King; Working Preacher
(www.workingpreacher.org/dear_wp.aspx?article_id=425.)

ⁱⁱⁱ Smith, Gary. *Higher Education* Sports Illustrated Vault
<http://sportsillustrated.cnn.com/vault/article/magazine/MAG1021912/8/index.htm>