

Epworth Chapel on the Green
November 22, 2009
Christ the King Sunday
Rev. Dr. Brook Thelander

Daniel 7:9-14
Psalm 93
Colossians 1:11-20
John 18:33-38

One of the oldest titles the Church has bestowed on Jesus Christ is the title “King of Kings.” The liturgical year celebrates that title, and its significance for the life of faith, on this day.

The first several generations of Christians confessed Christ as King in a context where Caesar demanded to be called king by all subjects. Christian faith began, grew, flourished, and was persecuted in an empire that wielded power by sword and profit.

For the early Christians, then, proclaiming Christ as “king” was a subversive and dangerous thing to do. It took courage to tell Caesar that he would only be granted *provisional* allegiance, that ultimate authority resided beyond his military might and economic power.

It takes courage to live with such a conviction today also.

It can be easy to sing hymns extolling Christ as “King of Kings” and Lord of Lords, but we need days like today to remind us of what we are affirming when we say and sing those words.

Reading through our epistle lesson this week, I discovered some interesting tidbits that I think might help us as we examine again what it means to call Christ “King.”

Paul tells the Colossians that Christ is the visible image of the invisible God, and that he existed before God made anything at all. So, one of the reasons Christ is king is because he is *preexistent*, that is, he was present before the whole Creation got underway. Not only that, Paul says, but Christ was also the *agent* of God’s creation. Everything that was made was made *through* him, and *for* him. And so we call him King.

Notice another interesting phrase from Paul. Paul tells us that Christ “holds all creation together.”

What does Paul mean by this?

I’m not sure, but you almost get the sense that without Jesus, the universe as we know it, the created order and our lives within it, would just disintegrate and fall apart. Life as we know it would degenerate into chaos. And so we call him King.

And if Christ is the author and head of Creation, then he is also the head of the Church, which is his Body. The Church is his creation, made possible by his shed blood on the Cross. It is through Jesus that we are reconciled to God. And it

is in Jesus that we see all the fullness of God in a human body. And so we call him King.

Perhaps Eugene Peterson says it better than I ever could. Listen to his take on this Pauline text:

*We look at this Son and see the God who cannot be seen. We look at this Son and see God's original purpose in everything created. For everything, absolutely everything, above and below, visible and invisible, rank after rank after rank of angels -- everything got started in him and finds its purpose in him. He was there before any of it came into existence and holds it all together right up to this moment. And when it comes to the church, he organizes and holds it together, like a head does a body. He was supreme in the beginning and -- leading the resurrection parade -- he is supreme in the end. From beginning to end he's there, towering far above everything, everyone. So spacious is he, so roomy, that everything of God finds its proper place in him without crowding. Not only that, but all the broken and dislocated pieces of the universe -- people and things, animals and atoms -- get properly fixed and fit together in vibrant harmonies, all because of his death, his blood that poured down from the Cross. You yourselves are a case study of what he does. At one time you all had your backs turned to God, thinking rebellious thoughts of him, giving him trouble every chance you got. But now, by giving himself completely at the Cross, actually dying for you, Christ brought you over to God's side and put your lives together, whole and holy in his presence. You don't walk away from a gift like that! You stay grounded and steady in that bond of trust, constantly tuned in to the Message, careful not to be distracted or diverted. There is no other message -- just this one. [Eugene Peterson, *The Message*]*

Indeed, we don't walk away from a gift like that. We embrace the gift-giver, we yield our hearts and lives to him. We bow in his presence now, in preparation for the time when every knee will bow and every tongue will confess what we already know to be true: that Jesus Christ is King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

One of the most powerful services of worship I've ever experienced occurred several years ago in Lexington, Kentucky, when I was a student at Asbury Seminary.

It was a Sunday evening service, and a young man who was a friend of ours named John Niehof was leading the congregation in singing hymns that night. John was a wonderful young man -- astute, proper, dignified. As we were singing an old hymn entitled, "How Great Thou Art," what I can only describe as a powerful moving of the Spirit began to settle on that congregation. We were overcome in the presence of the awesome and holy God.

Nothing was forced or contrived. But persons were weeping, some fell to their knees to pray, others lifted their hands toward heaven. Time seemed to stand still.

After several minutes I saw John Niehof move to the front and center of the church. He addressed the people and said: "I know that one day every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God. I know that one day I shall bow in His presence. But I feel that I must not wait until then. I feel that I must bow before Him in all of his greatness *right here, right now*, in this place." And that is exactly what he did.

Ultimately, *that* is why we call him King. Not because of sophisticated theological argument. But because there was a point somewhere in your life where

God in his love saw fit to usher you into his presence, and to come into the presence of God is an awesome and life-changing thing.

As we prepare to celebrate Holy Communion this morning, I want to remind you that the table to which you are invited is the King's table. It's a holy and special place. You are invited to dine with the King. To bow in his presence *now* in preparation for the day when we all will bow later.

So come with joy in your hearts and praise on your lips. For the King of Kings awaits to give us his grace.

In the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.