

Lord, make these words Your Word, that our hearts may become Your heart. Amen.

What do you think of when you think of kings?

Power? Majesty? Splendor? Palaces? Cruelty? Corruption?

On this last Sunday in the long season of “ordinary time” that starts after the Feast of Pentecost, we celebrate Christ as King, before we reset the church clock next week, and start the story all over again.

I recently learned more about how this focus got started.

According to my friend Craig Loya, bishop of Minnesota, it was first added to the Christian calendar by Pope Pius XI in 1925, in the bitterly divided aftermath of World War I, when nationalism and fascism were on the rise across Europe. Bishop Loya writes, “He conceived of it as a way to remind Christians that our primary allegiance is not to any earthly ruler or nation, but to Jesus Christ.”

We need to recall this origin in our times, for the Jesus we meet in the Gospels; the Jesus we meet in our worship; the Jesus we meet in prayer and in eucharist and in service – that Jesus is nowhere to be found in heresies like Christian nationalism which trumpet not humility and peace-making, but a white supremacist vision of earthly power by one group over others.

By contrast, where do the gospels show us Jesus as a king?

As a helpless 2-year-old in Bethlehem, honored by visiting dignitaries;

As a teacher and healer, riding into Jerusalem not on a war steed, but on a donkey;

Here in Pilate’s court, powerless, under arrest and trial;

And then nailed to a cross, a crown of thorns digging into his flesh.

Vulnerable, humble, powerless, dying –

is that what kingship looks like for Christ-followers?

Sometimes - risk and sacrifice are undeniably part of the package if we desire to follow the One who went to the Cross for us.

St. Andrew knew that, faithfully serving Jesus and his movement, while his brother Peter got the headlines.

Vulnerability and humility and service can look an awful lot like powerlessness.

But there is another adjective that mark's Jesus' kingship so often missing in worldly kings: love. The King of Love. That's what we call Jesus. Jesus is the gift of love from the God who is love, who cannot but love. And in everything he did and does, Jesus demonstrates that love that never quits, that love that gives and gives and gives itself away, asking nothing in return but always pleased to accept the love we reciprocate.

Today we celebrate who Christ truly is, this king who consented to become an embryo and then an infant, born to a young mother in tenuous circumstances. He said he was the Light of the world. But He knew that light would blind us. And so He consented to clothe Himself in flesh, in our human condition, to be limited by our boundedness in time and space. Not just to put on our humanity like a covering – but to fully live in it, not just appearing like a man, becoming one. He didn't just look like a helpless infant – he was one. He didn't just look like a criminal nailed to a cross – he died like one. The King of Kings and Lord of Lords became defenseless, for us. In our gospel reading today, that's what we see – a beaten and defenseless man being interrogated: “Are you a king?” “My kingdom is not from here,” He said. What kind of a kingdom is this?

Certainly not the kind our fairy tales have taught us to expect. Wasn't the kind of king Pilate recognized either, one with any political power. This king wasn't in charge of anything, no control over whether he lives or dies. But remember, the way the world thinks things should be is almost always opposite from how Jesus described the Kingdom of God. The Good News of Jesus' Way of Love is always upside down from what we expect. We think of kings and queens as wealthy, living sumptuously; Jesus lived without income, a traveling preacher and healer. We think of kings and queens as wielding power, sometimes absolute power. On Good Friday, Jesus looked like the ultimate loser. But God wasn't finished.

Some people say the Christian message is a fairy tale – but the fairy tale is the notion that power and strength reside in political and financial systems. There was more power in Christ in that interview with Pilate than the Roman governor would ever know... that's why he was so uncomfortable. Pilate was looking for a category to put Jesus into so he could either condemn him or set him free. Pilate didn't recognize him for who he truly was, the Truth.

The world still doesn't recognize him or his Kingdom. Do we?
His Kingdom is invisible, but he said it was right here, already come.

"The Kingdom of God is among you." or "Within you," he said.

The Kingdom of God is among us, my friends – and we are already its royalty.

When we are united with Christ in baptism, we are transformed,
given a new identity – we take on his royal blood and become
princes and princess ourselves, Christ's royal brothers and sisters.

Martin Luther described it as "The Great Exchange" –

Christ took on our beggars' rags, and gave us his royal robes to wear.

We may not look any more like royals than Jesus did – but we are.

As Christ-followers, we learn to see power in what the world thinks is weakness,
to see beauty in what the world deems hideous,
to see value in what the world says is worthless.

The Realm of God may be invisible, but just as you only see the wind
by seeing its effect on other things, like trees,
so the Kingdom only became visible in Jesus' time in his signs of power among
people, or when hearts changed, forgiveness and healing were released.

And that's still the way it becomes visible – whenever we act in that realm,
that energy field, the Kingdom of God becomes visible. Through us.

When we stop to listen to someone who needs to be heard;
when we stop and pray for healing for someone in pain;
when we support recovery for people stuck in addiction;
when we serve at the Plentiful Pantry or put food into the Community Fridge;
when we work to end war and ensure liberty and justice for all...

when we simply say, "Come, Lord Jesus," into every situation –

the kingdom of God becomes more visible. Through us.

Here. Now. You.

Amen.

John 18:33-37

Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him,

“Are you the King of the Jews?”

Jesus answered, “Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?”

Pilate replied, “I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?”

Jesus answered, “**My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here.**”

Pilate asked him, “So you are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.”

Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14

As I watched, thrones were set in place, and an Ancient One took his throne,
his clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool;
his throne was fiery flames, and its wheels were burning fire.

A stream of fire issued and flowed out from his presence. A thousand thousands served him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood attending him.

The court sat in judgment, and the books were opened.

As I watched in the night visions, I saw one like a human being coming with the clouds of heaven.

And he came to the Ancient One and was presented before him.

To him was given dominion and glory and kingship,
that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him.

**His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away,
and his kingship is one that shall never be destroyed.**

Revelation 1:4b-8

Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood, **and made us to be a kingdom**, priests serving his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Look! He is coming with the clouds; every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and on his account all the tribes of the earth will wail. So it is to be. Amen.

**“I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God,
who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.**