

Christ the King (Year B) - 11/25/24
The Rev. Emily Given

May the Spirit be in my speaking and may the Spirit be also in your hearing. Amen.

The musical Hamilton is currently being staged here in Philly, so the first King who comes to mind is the fearful yet strangely arrogant King George III, who reigned over Great Britain during the colonial period in America. In his big solo moment, George realizes he does not have the power over the new colony he imagined, so he stands centerstage and *reminds* them of his “love”.

He sings -
“Oceans rise, Empires fall.
We have seen each other through it all.
When push comes to shove,
I will send a fully armed battalion to remind you of my love.”

It doesn't exactly sound like mutual affection, does it?
And not exactly what I think about then I think of God's love.

Today is the Feast of Christ the King. Several writers and theologians have started to move away from using the word “King” because of the problematic ways earthly kings have behaved over time. When we look at them with modern eyes and values, Kings have sometimes come down on what we call the “wrong side of history.” Fairytale kings also play into this narrative. Glossing over the issues of exerting power over one another and having it seen as romantic or “dreamy”. The term is Lord OVER ... but as Christians, we have the of experience Lord WITH. Emmanuel. God with us. Next week as we begin the season of Advent, we are waiting and waiting for the coming of our King - the Emmanuel. God in human form. Love came down from heaven, for us and with us.

So why use the word “king” for Jesus?

I still think the metaphor can be a helpful one. There is great power in reclaiming something for the glory of God. Maybe the middle place is to use the term “the reign of God instead of the Kingdom of God”.

One of my favorite hymns is “Jesus shall reign where're the sun,
Does its successive journeys run.
His Kingdom stretch from shore to shore,
till sun shall rise and set not more.

There is no place... no person... no moment ... outside of the care of God. In an everlasting way.

What does God's Kingdom look like? How do we as People of God love it into being? St. Teresa of Avila, a 16th-century Spanish nun and one of my favorites (as I have mentioned before in a Saturday letter) said the way we bring the reign of God to life is with our bodies and our hearts.

She wrote, "Christ has no body but yours, No hands, no feet on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes with which He looks Compassion on this world. Yours are the feet with which He walks to do good, Yours are the hands, with which He blesses all the world."

What does the reign of God look like? It is us BEING the love of Jesus in the world. Making it possible through presence to have God's reign - God's Kingdom - stretch further and further because of OUR witness through the ways we walk in the world. The invitations we make for others to know God - in words and in our ways.

In John's Gospel this morning, we see Jesus on trial. Pilate asked two questions but Jesus only answered one. Pilate asks "what have you done?" Jesus has no response. Then he asks "who ARE you?" Jesus responds to this question. For Jesus, it wasn't the things he did (or didn't do) but was WHO he was. How Jesus being the embodiment of God was the real point. Then Jesus reminds Pilate... and reminds us "My kingdom was not of this world." If it were, everything would look so different. Pilate was talking politics but Jesus was speaking truth. Not glamor but goodness. Not status but sacrifice.

The reading from Daniel refers to the "Ancient One". I find that a comforting term. "I am the Alpha and the Omega... The one who IS and WAS and who IS to come". We have never been without the presence of God... God is here now... and God will continue to walk with us. That is a covenant. A promise made holy through relationship.

So maybe the way to look at Jesus as King is as a unifer and not a ruler. Being a citizen in that kingdom is the most meaningful source of identity for each of us.

Rob Wright, who is the Bishop of Atlanta has a great podcast titled For People. This week he said, "The throne that Jesus wants is not an opulent chair but the human heart. The treasure is not the stuff that rots, the treasure is the compassionate interaction with one another. Jesus doesn't demand deference, Jesus wants to walk along side, send us out as participants in the work he has begun." That is the heart of OUR king.

King George from Hamilton was right.

Ocean's Rise, Empires fall.

Yet the one who is with us through it all is our King, our savior, our redeemer - Jesus.

There will be no fully armed battions... there will be blessings, and mercy, and unending care. The one who will restore all things. Who points our eyes to a kingdom not of this world. And yet we are not called to abandon this world but make it better.

I am the Alpha and the Omega. In me there is no end. My kingdom is yours so that you may have life abundantly. Amen.