

The Last Sunday after Pentecost - Year B  
November 22, 2009  
The Reverend Robert P. Travis

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## “My Kingdom Is Not From This World”

*Daniel 7:9-10,13-14, Psalm 93, Revelation 1:4b-8, John 18:33-37*

Jesus tells Pilate: “My Kingdom is not from this world.” As 21st century Americans, it is a good thing He said that because we do not have a king nor any real notion of what having a king is like. So any kingdom, any king is sort of out of our worldview.

So it can be hard for us to really celebrate this Sunday as it deserves as Christ the King deserves.

This is Christ the King Sunday and in another culture that may make more sense, but it took me a lot of pondering, to figure out what that means to me, and I guess it is similar for most of you what does it mean when we say “The Lord is King?”

Well another other worldly example is burned into my mind, because of the beauty of its presentation. It is the image of kingship in the Lord of the Rings, specifically in the last movie, “The Return of the King.” After the great battle is won, the scene is of the Coronation of King Aragorn, Gondor receives it's king, after hundreds of years of being a kingdom without a king. The people are all gathered, high on the mountain, overlooking the plain. The king receives his crown, and everyone falls to their knees. In spite of hundreds of years without a king, the people have remembered, their culture still values kingship, and they remember that kneeling, is the way to show loyalty and obedience to the King. The way to show reverence for one regarded as greatest of all. The way to respect the one who will care for all the people through his gracious rule.

The King responds by surveying his subjects, with pleasure that things have been set right, but he observes that one thing is not right. He goes to the small people, who were responsible for overthrowing the evil one, and saving their world, and orders them to stand up again, recognizing that his kingship depended on their success, he tells them, “you kneel before no man.” And he kneels before them.

Watching that, even from where I am, unfamiliar with kingship in daily life, gave me the shivers. As it probably did for many, and I think it was because it struck a

chord in my soul, as I recognized my hopes for Jesus' kingship. The King's first act as king is gracious and right. That King testified to the truth and humbled himself, to raise up those he made worthy.

Another experience of Kingship which is not from my world, I experienced in a children's song I learned in Norway where some of my ancestors are from.

The song goes "Kanskje kommer kongen, hit til middag naa i dag, vi har decket paa perongen med god mat av alle slag." that means — Maybe the king will come to lunch today, we have set the table with good food, of all variety.

The song describes all the preparations that this couple are making, in the hopes that the king will stop by their house for lunch. It talks about setting out their best food, and gathering all their friends for the meal.

In Norway, the king is regarded with less regalia, less pomp than in England and other places. In a country that until the very recent past was agrarian. He has typically been the chief among farmers. The king is valued for his humility, and honored for his place as first among equals. He must strive to be just like everyone else, and yet he must rule over them with fairness. The song makes sense to Norwegian children, because in their conception of the king, it makes sense that he might come around, and visit the various farms, to make sure they remained in allegiance with him. When he did, the people needed to be ready to serve him, and so the old children's song reminds children that the king might come to lunch today so we need to be ready for him, by setting out our best meal.

This is a loving, familiar idea of a king, but not one that fits into the grand world of royalty as many of us think of kings. It is not of this world, Is that how Jesus means it? Is that what he means when he says, my kingdom is not of this world?

As He is talking to Pilate, the one in charge of his imprisonment, and eventual execution, he refers to the notion that if his kingdom were of this world, his followers would be fighting to free him. But they don't.

In part, I believe He is saying that His Kingdom is not yet fulfilled in this world, as it is in heaven. And that seems to be what the visions in Daniel and Revelation, are referring to, these brilliant visions of bright light, gleaming thrones, the great King coming on the clouds so that every eye can see him. These visions are otherworldly in a different way. And their images place hope of an everlasting kingdom in our hearts, especially in times when our worldly kingdoms seem to fall apart so suddenly and so easily.

And the psalm reminds us, that Jesus' kingship is not just in the end, that ever since the world began, his throne has been established, he is from everlasting.

But whether we see kingship as recognition of something true and noble and good, as in the Lord of the Rings or as an honor given to one who regards himself as first among equals, as in the Norwegian song, whether we see kingship as involving thrones, and bright light, and visions of splendor, or as one who will come and rescue us from our troubles, there is something about Jesus' kingship, which is disturbing, and otherworldly to our American sensibilities.

I think C.S. Lewis identified that disturbing quality when he wrote: "Men are reluctant to pass over from the notion of an abstract and negative deity to the living God. I do not wonder. Here lies the deepest tap-root of Pantheism and of the objection to traditional imagery (of Jesus as God). [That imagery] was hated not, at bottom, because it pictured Him as a man but because it pictured Him as king... The Pantheist's God does nothing, demands nothing. He is there if you wish for him, like a book on a shelf. He will not pursue you. There is no danger that at any time heaven and earth should flee away at His glance."

The image of Jesus as King, is otherworldly to us these days, primarily because a King requires something of us, majesty is fearful because it demands something of us. If Jesus is king, we cannot simply come to Him when we want to, or turn to Him when we need Him. If Jesus is King we are his subjects. That means He can ask things of us, and expect us to do them.

Kings in the past have abused that privilege, Kings we have heard of, ask too much of people, and provide too little. Those kind of kings, led the people of this land to reject the notion of monarchy, to run away from the idea of having a king.

But Jesus kingdom is not of this world, and Jesus is not that kind of king, Jesus is a king we can count on, Jesus loves each and every one of us, and gave up his own life, to invite us into His kingdom. Jesus is a king we can rejoice in, we can celebrate, because His kingship is based in love, His rule is truth and honor.

We belong to the truth, and so He is our king, and we listen to His voice. And as our King, He does require something of us, yet what He requires, brings us to fullness of life.

He requires that we love each other, even those we see as unloveable, He requires of us, that we tell others about him, that we bring those we know, to know Him, and invite them to be His subjects.

So if the king were indeed coming to lunch today, what could we do to set a feast for Him, how could we best prepare for his coming?

More than our best food and wine, more than our best decorations and music, Jesus is concerned about the guests at the feast. If Jesus were coming to lunch today, He would want to see everyone we know, to welcome him to the feast.

We can follow Jesus as our King, and prepare for his coming, by doing what he requires of us as his subjects.

An opportunity is coming for you to invite others to know Him. Invite your friends and acquaintances to our Alpha Course here at Ascension in January. We will set the table with good things, we will invite our King to come, that is a good first step, in being the subjects the King. Think of it like a practice for the King's true return, for His second coming, when He comes upon the clouds with such glory and majesty. For then it will be too late.

This time, we will practice for the King's return, by inviting others to become his subjects through the Alpha Course. And it is in your hands, whether the guests He wants to see, will be at the table when He comes.