

Sermon

Northminster Presbyterian Church: Christ the King, Year B (2006)

Reading of the texts: Revelation 1⁴⁻⁸; John 18³³⁻³⁷

Introduction

Jesus is king. But hey, Elvis is king. Cotton is king. Richard Petty is king. Simba is king. If you're hungry, there's Burger King, and if you want some tunes, there's B.B. King. For action stars you have the Scorpion King and for novels you can get Stephen King. We read the King James Version, we listen to Larry King, we watch "King of the Hill" and the third "Lord of the Rings" movie—the "Return of the King". No sooner have we confessed that Jesus Christ is king than we are attacked by a million little kings all vying for our attention, all fighting for our loyalty. Moreover, most of us want to be in that position. We call it being 'king for a day', although, we really want to be king for much longer.

Our Desire For Power

I remember seeing a T-shirt once that said, "Try Jesus", as though Jesus is simply one of the kings on the buffet table of kings and we can choose whichever one we want. But Jesus is king whether we like it or not. In the cult classic "Monty Python and the Holy Grail", there is a scene in which a bunch of peasants are working in a field and one of the peasants started criticizing the king: "The king's a fink. He's not my king. We don't have to have him for our king." The king's men hear the peasant and come and arrest him. As they are hauling off the peasant, he's still yelling that the king has no power over him, that he doesn't have a king. But the king is the king, whether we like it or not. We are often uncomfortable with that Kingship. We equate comfort with having control of our lives, so we want control over our lives. Yeah, we'll give two hours on

Sunday and ten percent of our cash—if that’s all the King wants, he can have that. But we want Jesus to be on standby; like the old “Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?” gameshow, we like having Jesus available as our ‘LifeLine’. But we want the final say. We want to retain in our lives what the business world calls ‘managing ownership’. We have a name for this—‘control freak’.

The True Source Of Power

Pontius Pilate is a control freak. It’s Friday morning and Jesus is standing trial before Pilate after having been betrayed in Gethsemane the night before. And Pilate asks Jesus: “Are you king of the Jews?” He doesn’t say, “Are you king of Israel?” because that’s a religious title and Pilate really doesn’t care whether Jesus is king of Israel or not. But king of the Jews—king of Judea—now that’s a political title and Pilate is very interested in the answer to that question. Jesus is not intimidated by Pilate, but begins his own interrogation, asking Pilate what he’s heard. When Pilate asks Jesus the question in a different way, Jesus tells us more about him and more about ourselves than we probably want to know. Jesus says his kingdom is not of this world, because of his kingdom were of this world, than his followers would command battalions, formations, and fleets; they would change the Federal Reserve lending rate and the United States Tax Code; they would flood bookshelves and movie theatres with propaganda pieces. But Jesus isn’t that kind of king. The radical thing about Jesus as king is that Jesus doesn’t change policies or laws or economics or organizations or history or culture. Jesus changes people. Jesus changes people not by exerting his power over them or forcing them to do something or persuading them to see it his way or getting a majority of the people to vote for him; Jesus changes people by dying for them.

The seventeenth century mathematician and philosopher Blaise Pascal once wrote that we have a “God-shaped hole” that we are trying to fill. Some of us try to fill this hole in the arms of a lover; some of us try to fill it with money and prestige; some of us try to fill it with the acceptance of others; some of us try to fill it with food or drink; some of us even try to fill it by out-spiritualizing everyone else. All those little kings vying for our attention and we, thinking they will give us peace and meaning, chase after them. But there is only one who can fill that vacuum. This is the meaning of the Lord’s Supper. Here, at the Table, all are equal because all stand under the Lordship of Christ. Here, at the Table, the baptized are healed of our wounds, strengthened by God’s grace, and empowered to labor more diligently for the King who has saved us. Here, at the Table, our longings are met and that hole in our spirit is filled. This Table reminds us that every time the world, like the serf in the Monty Python movie, has asserted its there is no king, tragedy has occurred; yet, when we confess what is true—that Jesus Christ is Lord—we are made whole, our communities are healed, the world itself looks a little more like it was intended to. That is the power of the King; that is the power of his banquet Table.

Conclusion

In the Jim Carrey movie, “Bruce Almighty”, the character Bruce complains and complains about God not doing enough in his life and God not fixing what ought to be fixed—so God, played rather smartly by Morgan Freeman, gives Bruce the power to be God. Bruce uses his newfound power in spectacular ways: Splitting a bowl of tomato soup like it’s the Red Sea, turning his beat-up 280ZX into a new Ferrari, and getting the dream promotion he’s always wanted. As long as he uses his God-given power for himself, he becomes more miserable and more distraught. It is only when he confesses

that he cannot do it on his own, that he desperately needs God to be in charge over his life, that Bruce begins to find some peace and meaning. No matter how hard we try, Christians, we cannot do this on our own. We know what Pilate would not acknowledge: Christ is King! May we confess his Lordship with joy and thanksgiving, for his kingdom is the only kingdom of peace and meaning. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.