

Sermon for the Feast of Christ the King, November 25, 2018

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

“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.”

- John 18:37

Once again, the Church’s year comes to close. Once again, another year has passed and still the Church awaits the coming of her Lord, the coming of her king. On this Christ the King Sunday we end our Christian year with the reminder of just who it is we long for, for whom we wait: For Christ our King.

We are reminded again today of a truth that is easy to forget as we go about our lives in this world: our true citizenship is not the one connected to our birth certificates, our driver’s licenses, or our passports. Our true citizenship rests in our baptism. We Christians live in the democracies, republics, dictatorships, and kingdoms of this world, yet our true home is in a kingdom that is not of this world.

Amid the busyness of life in this world it’s easy, however, for us to forget full meaning of this truth for our lives. To say that Jesus Christ is king has certain implications and ramifications. It’s not a neutral statement. It’s a statement of allegiance. It says something about our relationship to states and cultures in which we find ourselves. Especially because wrapped up in such a statement is the question what makes Christ king? What makes Him our king? And what does that mean for us and our lives in this world?

These are the questions our lessons would help us answer. Our first lesson comes from the visions of the prophet Daniel. Daniel is speaking to the remnant of the people of Judah in exile in Babylon. The exiles are trying to make sense of all that

has happened in the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple and their being carted off to Babylon.

In the ancient world gods were understood to be tied to a place. Muskegon would have its gods in its temples. Grand Rapids would have its gods in its temples. If Grand Rapids conquered Muskegon and captured us and took us all back to Grand Rapids the expectation would be twofold. First, it would prove that our gods were weaker, because obviously they didn't defend us. Secondly, being in a new place we should worship the gods of that place.

But the Jewish prophets in Babylon like Ezekiel and Daniel are raised up by the Lord to tell the remnant that the conventional wisdom might be true of other gods, but it's not true about the God of Israel; the God of their ancestors; the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They are not in Babylon because God was weak. God instead was using the Babylonians for His purposes. They are not to worship the gods and goddesses of Babylonia – Marduk and Ishtar – for the Lord is with them in Babylon, just as the Lord was with their ancestors in Egypt, Sinai, and the Promised Land.

The prophet Daniel sees a series of visions in the night. Visions of fantastical beasts. Revelation-type stuff. The beasts represent kingdoms and empires, who themselves represent the unseen powers and principalities that are war with God.

As Daniel watches, each beast in his vision is more terrifying than the last. But then, He sees a vision of Heaven. Thrones are put in place, and He sees the "Ancient One" or in older parlance the "Ancient of Days" that is one older than everything take His throne. Around him thousands upon thousands of angels sing and fire flows from His presence. It is the Father, the Almighty.

And there in the Father's presence a court sits in judgment. Books are opened. (And this is what our lesson cut out...) the beasts, the powers and principalities, the great kingdoms and empires – Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome – are judged and stripped of their power. Daniel's vision is meant to remind the Jews that no

matter what the situation looks like on the ground it is the God of their ancestors who is in charge.

But then Daniel sees something, nay, someone else. He says (and the NRSV botches this completely), not “One like a human being,” but really, “One like a Son of Man.” He is presented to the Ancient of Days, and is given kingship, glory and dominion, as a result of the judgment of the heavenly court. Kingship, glory, and dominion that is everlasting, *“that shall not pass away... that shall never be destroyed.”*

Now, where else have you heard that phrase, “Son of Man?” That’s right, from Jesus. What does Jesus always call Himself in the Gospels? “The Son of Man.” Jesus is saying, to anyone who wants to listen, “that guy Daniel was talking about? I’m that guy.” What’s more, the Jews understood that *“the one like a Son of Man”* was a term not of humanity, but of divinity. For Jesus to say, “I am the Son of Man,” is to say, “I am the Son of the God,” which is to say, “I am God.”

And what does Daniel tell us about the Son of Man? That when the books are opened and judgment is made the Son of Man is presented to the Father and the Father gives Him *“dominion and glory and kingship, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion in an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, and His kingship is a kingship that shall never be destroyed.”*

The Son of Man is made king over all kings. His kingdom is over all kingdoms. His dominion is over all dominions. In other words the great empires of the world – Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome, America – bow and fall away before Him.

Why is the Son of Man made King of kings and Lord of lords? Why is He given such a kingdom? Because He was faithful unto death, even death on a cross. Because by His cross, *“He has freed us from our sin by His blood.”* Because it was *“For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth.”* To testify that there is one more powerful than all the empires, powers and

principalities, there is one more powerful than even the greatest tyrant: death, whose empire is more expansive than the empire of the grave.

Jesus kingdom is not of this world, and yet, God has chosen to have the throne of His kingdom placed squarely in the midst of the powers and principalities, right at the heart of the dominion of sin and death. Jesus takes His throne not in a palace. Not in chair of gold and jewels. His throne is rough-hewn cross.

The Son of Man is enthroned between heaven and earth so that He may unite earth to heaven. The Son of Man makes His throne in the mouth of the grave, in the gaping maw of death, so that He may proclaim to the world the truth that the Kingdom of God is more powerful than the most powerful thing we know. Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome, America, even the grave will be stripped of their power. They are nothing compared to Christ and His kingdom.

And that is revealed in His resurrection. Even the greatest empire of all – the grave – cannot defeat this king. His kingdom extends its claim to authority to places no earthly kingdom can – into the realm of death and the grave, and death and the grave are powerless to stop Him.

This is why the martyrs went joyfully into the arena. This is why they did not fear being burned, or being torn to pieces by wild beasts. This why did not fear death. Rome can kill. Rome has the power of death behind it. That's nice. Who cares? Jesus has made Rome's instrument of death His throne. Rome can kill, but Jesus can give life to the dead. So who is more powerful?

What does that mean for you and for me? Saint John tells us in Revelation. Jesus who loved us has "*freed us from our sins by His blood, and made us to be a kingdom.*" Do you notice that? Who did the freeing? He freed us from our sins. He made us to be a kingdom. And notice this: What the tense of the freeing? What's the tense of the kingdom-making? Past-tense. It's already done. It's already over. You are freed from sin. You are part of the kingdom of God.

Yes, you struggle with sin, but in Jesus you know how the struggle ends because you are already free through His blood. The kingdom is not something you need to work to bring about. The kingdom already is through His blood. It already exists. It is already here in the forgiveness of sins and the sacraments, even as we wait for it to come in its fulness. You are already part of it. Not because of anything you have done, but because of what Christ has done for you.

There in the water and word of your baptism the Holy Spirit transferred you into the kingdom of God by uniting you to Jesus in His death and resurrection. There Jesus gave you the forgiveness He won on the cross. There His blood washed you clean of sin. You are no longer a citizen of just another empire that will pass away. You are no longer even a citizen of the empire of death. You belong to the Son of Man and His kingdom. His kingdom that shall never pass away. You belong to Jesus who makes His throne on the cross that He may give life to those in the grave, that He may give life to you.

What then does this mean for your everyday life? Jesus says, *“Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice?”* What does Jesus say? He says that those who trust in Him have eternal life. He says that the work of our salvation is finished in His death on the cross. He says that death is not the end, but rather He is the end of death. He says that you, O sinner, are forgiven. That in Him your sin is separated from you as far as the east is from the west. He says that when you eat His flesh and drink His blood You have life – you share the very life of God. He says that He has become a child of man, so that you may be a child of God. He says that His Father is your Father.

This is the truth. And hearing this truth, speaking this truth, trusting this truth is what it is to belong to the truth, to belong to His kingdom. Listening to Him He puts our relationship to the passing empires of this world into perspective. Listening to Him and hearing again and again the truth of what He has done for us, creates faith in us to trust Him, and faith leads us to do what He says and follow His example. Listening to Him we are reminded that even if heaven and

earth should pass away (and they will) the promises He made in baptism remain, His work upon the cross remains, His kingdom will remain because it is not of this world.

It is not of this world, and through Him, and by Him, you are no longer of this world either. You belong to another kingdom. You belong to the kingdom of life. You belong the kingdom of forgiveness. You belong to kingdom of the Ancient of Days and the Son of Man. You belong to kingdom of God and the Lamb that shall never pass away. Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome, have all passed away. Even America will pass away. Christ's kingdom shall never pass away. As one year passes into the next we like saints before us wait with patient longing for we know our King, we know what He has done, we know that He will come. Amen, and come Lord Jesus.