

Sermon for November 21, 2021
Last Sunday after Pentecost
The Feast of Christ the King
Proper 29B
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Los Alamos, New Mexico

2 Samuel 23:1-7
Psalm 132:1-19
Revelation 1:4b-8
John 18:33-37

This is the feast of Christ the King.
The theme of the feast carried through all the lessons Sunday.
In second Samuel we hear the last words of David
– the beloved King of Israel and the beloved of the Lord.
He says:

“One who rules over people justly,
Ruling in the fear of God,
Is like the light of morning,
Like the sun rising on a cloudless morning,
Gleaming from the rain on the grassy land.”

The Psalmist writes:

The Lord has sworn an oath to David; *
in truth, he will not break it:
"A son, the fruit of your body *
will I set upon your throne.
If your children keep my covenant
and my testimonies that I shall teach them, *
their children will sit upon your throne for evermore."

And Revelation follows:

“Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come ... and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.”

And the Gospel provides the boldface underline with Pilate’s question: “Are you the King of the Jews?”

This is not a polite question.

Pilate knows the status of Herod as the puppet king of Israel to sit below the seat of the Emperor god of Rome – Caesar.

Is this a pretender who challenges Rome and the authority Pilate wields as the hand of Caesar in Palestine.

And Jesus replies: “My kingdom is not from this world.”

To which Pilate asks: “So you are a king?”

And Jesus closes: “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.”

Thomas echoed the pronouncement when he declared:

“My Lord and My God.”

It was the Franciscans, followers of St. Francis of Assisi, a religious order vowed to poverty, who led the church to designate the last Sunday of the Church year as the Feast of Christ the King.

Seems a bit antithetical for an order devoted to service to elevate Jesus to kingship.

After all, royalty at the time were not necessarily noted for their care of the poor.

However, that is the feast we celebrate today.

The Feast of Christ the King is not all that comfortable for us.

If you watch British period movies when the tenant says “my Lord,” it’s with a gesture to tip the hat or touch the forelock.

We are not that enamored of royalty in our own country
except as celebrities and at arm's length.
Just look the reception given at the former Prince and Princess
Harry and Meghan after they disavowed their status.

In our own way, we do revere the royalty of others
– but at a distance: Just look at the popularity of Downton Abbey.
However, we draw a line to the deference given to those whose
status is granted by the accident of birth rather than earned by
merit.

Part of our difficulty is we seem to live in two realities,
a separation of church and state.

There's the world of daily living with politics, jobs, school, work,
friends and relatives, and those we relate to or not,
and those we ignore or look down on.

Then there's our religious life, which is about doing good, being
spiritual, saying prayers, even listening to this homily.
Royalty doesn't seem to fit in either category,
but royalty exists in both:
Lord Almighty, Christ the King, Queen of Heaven.

But for us it's easier to look at Jesus the Christ
as our Redeemer or Savior. Or Jesus the Great Religious Leader
or Christ the Guru, or but not so much as the King of Kings,
Lord of Lords - unto whom every knee shall bow.
But for me my youth echoes a different title:
– Jesus Christ Superstar.

It's been fifty years since I first played the album,
but in my mind, I can still hear the orchestra in the grand crescendo
at the end when all the lights in the room shine on the glowing,
resurrected Christ, and he raises his arms in absolute triumph.

There's something quite moving about the intersection of the story of the Gospel and the music in *Jesus Christ Superstar*. The combination of text and music resonates deeper than mere intellectual understanding.

The combination of music and text seems to draw us deeper into the meaning of the revealed truth in the underlying theology.

Before Covid, I participated in a theology group in Santa Fe led by a Jewish Rabbi.

The group consisted of every faith in the spectrum from atheist, agnostic, to Episcopal priest to Hebrew scholars. The group has been together for several years, so they knew each other quite well.

But, it was kind of surprising during a discussion one week when one of the participants admonished the Rabbi over some disagreement:

"I know you've said before that you don't believe in God..."

There was a moment of silence before the Rabbi replied:

"I don't believe in God. I have a relationship with God."

That was a revelation to me.

I've always had problems with the "belief" thing, but this made all the difference.

I can believe that the Mets will win the World Series.

I can believe that the government will do the right thing.

I can believe John Kennedy was a great leader but not a good man.

I can believe all sorts of things, but that doesn't make them true.

And when I believe in something, there may be no feeling attached to a belief.

However, when I have a relationship I know what that feels like.

I have a relationship with my wife.

I have a relationship with my friends.

I have a relationship with the members of this church.

I know what those relationships feel like. Similarly,
I know what my relationship with God feels like,
and that feeling resonates with the music we sing each Sunday
in the hymns, and it resonates with the music of *Jesus Christ
Superstar*.

The words by Tim Rice and the music by Andrew Lloyd Webber
intertwine to create a flow of feelings
that carry through the story of Jesus as told in the Gospels
from the first meetings to the triumphal entry
to the tragic death and eventual glory.
These facets of the story
crystalize in the emotions carried by the songs.
And as I read the Gospel today, I heard Pilate sing:
“What is truth? Is yours the same as mine.”

We are in relationship with each other,
and together we as a church community
are in relationship with God.
What does that feel like for you?
When you hear the music of this coming season,
do you feel your heartstrings?

As we approach Advent,
as we contemplate the Birth of God Incarnate,
and anticipate the return of the Christ in Glory:
Let us take time out to ponder
who we are in relationship with God.

And as you contemplate your life with Christ,
sing to yourself the words we hear this season:

“And he shall reign for ever and for ever. Alleluia!”