

CHRIST THE KING
2 Samuel 7:1-17
John 18:28-38
Preached by Dr. Cahill
Babcock Presbyterian Church
Sunday, November 20, 2011

Today, the last Sunday of the Church year, we celebrate Christ the King, a son of David and the son of God. Christ, the King of a Kingdom not of this world whose birth was long expected, but when he finally came nobody wanted. Christ, the King, who came into the world not to be served, but to serve and give up his life as a ransom for many.

One thousand years before Christ was born the people of Israel, not content to be ruled by Samuel the Prophet, clamored for a king so they could become like the other nations of the earth. Samuel's answer was, "be careful what you ask for." He warned the people that kings tend to consolidate their power, have large standing armies and levy high taxes. What's more, most kings don't have good track records for keeping the peace and establishing justice. Samuel knew that for every good and competent king there would always be twice as many bad and incompetent kings.

Give him credit. Samuel didn't make this case because he was about to be booted out and quickly forgotten, but because he knew Israel wasn't supposed to be like the other nations. He reminded the people that God alone was the King of Israel and under God's reign Israel always prospered even without any top-heavy bureaucracies.

But, under mounting pressure, Samuel finally relented and reluctantly consecrated Saul to be the first King of Israel, only to be proven right during Saul's reign, which after a strong start, sputtered into tragedy and ruin. The next two kings, David and Solomon, fared somewhat better, but even their reigns were tarnished by fatal moral lapses because each in his own way convinced himself he was too big to fail.

Then soon after Solomon died, the slow descent into oblivion was set in motion when Israel split into the Northern Kingdom Israel and Judah the Southern kingdom. Very quickly the Northern Kingdom, ruled by usurpers, openly embraced paganism, while Judah, still ruled by David's descendants, some of whom were good, but the majority of them bad, went back and forth depending on the faithfulness of the current reigning king. Even so, within roughly 500 years first Israel and then Judah having lost their ways, were both defeated and hauled off into exile. Never again would the House of David rule in Jerusalem.

But that doesn't mean the House of David went extinct. David's descendants still quietly lived on in reduced circumstances from one generation to the next until one Joseph of Nazareth became the husband of Mary, the mother of Jesus. All this because of a promise made and kept to David at the height of his power a thousand years earlier.

One day David let it be known to Nathan the Prophet that he wanted to build a great temple in Jerusalem to glorify God. But that night the Lord came to Nathan basically saying God didn't want a house for himself. Instead David was promised God would build him a house, a dynasty that would rule forever.

“When...you rest with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body and I will establish his Kingdom...forever. I will be his Father and he shall be my son... And your house and Kingdom shall be established forever before you.” (2 Samuel 7:12-17)

Of course, both David and Nathan and all the kings and prophets after them never fully comprehended the implications of this prophecy. They were content that God guaranteed Israel would be perpetually ruled by the House of David, but little did they realize David's greatest son would rule over a new kingdom not of this world.

It's understandable that the majority of the Jews were expecting their Messiah to be a powerful statesman/warlord who'd reclaim Jerusalem's former glory. And yet there were the few, Priests and Prophets and even Pharisees who pondered the scriptures and came to realize God's ways are not our ways, and that God was about to birth something completely new, mysterious and totally unexpected.

Isn't it obvious? Once we think we've got God all figured out, God does an end run, confounding our preconceived notions and surprising us with something completely different.

No doubt, God disappointed the Jews by sending a Messiah not matching their expectations, but don't be too quick to fault the Jews for their myopic vision because we have it, too. Like them, our God is too small and too tame. Like them, we've reinvented God to satisfy our wants. Like the Jews of Jesus' time, we want simple answers to complex questions and easy solutions for complicated problems. We don't want to be held accountable for our inaction, we don't want to be our brother's keeper. We don't like being told, like the rich young ruler, we lack the one thing. And so we plod along, saying our prayers, trying to be good and never being fully satisfied.

Why? Because we're afraid to embrace the King who invites us to come with him and die.

Why would you want to follow a king who expects you to die with him? Why would anyone in his right mind agree to forsake all the rights and privileges of this world in order to satisfy a king who refused to claim his own rights and privileges, even though they were his for the taking?

Isn't this what happened when Jesus stood before Pilate? We tend to condemn Pilate for quickly caving in to the religious establishment when they threatened to go over his head and plead their case to Caesar. For good reason Pilate didn't want to involve himself in a local religious squabble, but to get their way, the Temple priests lied, saying

Jesus advocated a tax revolt and proclaimed himself greater than Caesar. Desperately, Pilate tried to get Jesus to defend himself, but Jesus remained silent except for one brief exchange.

Pilate asked Jesus, “Are you the king of the Jews?” Jesus answered, “Do you ask this on your own or did others tell you about me?” Pilate replied, “I am not a Jew am I? Your own nation and chief priests handed you over to me. What have you done?” Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over... But as it is, my kingdom is not from here.” Pilate answered, “So, you are a king?” (John 18:33-37)

Here we see the intersection of the king of the House of David and the Cosmic Christ, God stepping down from his throne to come into our world in human form to proclaim the Good News: God’s Kingdom is nearer than you think.

Pilate couldn’t grasp this. He was more comfortable dealing with the things of this world, rather than God’s Truth setting us free. But isn’t that true of us all?

Next Sunday begins the Season of Advent, a time set aside for the Church to enter the mystery of God enveloping his world. Advent is especially the season set aside to prepare for Christ’s coming and a deepening awareness of his kingdom that’s here but hidden, until we look for it.

And how do we look? Through scripture reading, prayer and meditation, worship and fellowship and last but not least through servant-hood, making yourself available for when the King appears to you through those who are hungry, thirsty, naked and friendless.

When Jesus began his ministry in Galilee, he could have drawn attention to himself by simply identifying himself as the Messiah, but he didn’t. Instead he preached, “Repent, for the Kingdom of God is near.” Repent, literally, “turn yourself around.” If you’re not getting satisfaction where you’ve been looking, then turn around and find it in Christ.

And remember, Christ’s Kingdom comes near whenever anyone accomplishes God’s will by being intentionally present to the ones Christ loves the most, those who can never pay you back.

Christ is King. Christ has come. Christ will come again and again. He’ll continue to come to bless and empower you, to reaffirm and replenish you. And best of all, you’ll be touched by the deepest mystery of the universe, the Word becoming flesh, the King becoming a nobody, God becoming one of us so we can be one with him and each other now and forever. Amen.