

CHRIST THE KING SUNDAY & THANKSGIVING

November 22, 2020

Matthew 25:36-41

UMC Geneva IL

What comes to mind when you hear the words “King” and “Kingdom?” Do you think of Walt Disney’s Magical Kingdom? Or perhaps the British Royal family? I noticed on TV that yet another movie is slated to be released depicting the life of Prince Charles and Princess Diana. Perhaps some of you envisioned a stately gentleman seated on a royal throne, wearing a golden crown, scepter in hand, decked out in soft purple and white robes.

Well, today is Christ the King Sunday AND Thanksgiving Sunday, and my job is to bring these two themes together. How are we going to do that? Let’s start with Christ the King Sunday – the very last Sunday in the Christian Year before the start of Advent, which is next week! Jesus’s mission as Christ the King was to establish the Kingdom of God...here...on earth...a mission he continues to fulfill through us, his disciples. His kingdom was radically different from the kingdom of Imperial Rome and their Jewish puppets – the Herodian kings in Palestine where Jesus lived.

In fact, Jesus and his Kingdom inaugurated a radical reversal of the values and leadership style of Imperial Rome. This is perhaps most clearly seen, and succinctly stated, in Luke 1 – in Mary’s song of praise to God known as the *Magnificat*. In her song, Mary praises the God who looks with favor on the lowliness of his servant, Mary. She extols the God who shows the strength of his arm by scattering the proud, in their imaginations; bringing down the powerful from their thrones while lifting up the lowly; filling the hungry with good things and sending the rich away empty; and showing great kindness to the poor, the powerless and marginalized.

So who is King Jesus and what is his Kingdom all about? As biblical scholar Marcus Borg puts it, “In a sentence, Jesus’s kingdom, the kingdom of God is about what life would be like on earth if God were King and the rulers of this world were not. The kingdom of God is about God’s justice in contrast to the systemic injustice of the kingdoms and dominion systems of this world!” (1)

Unlike Imperial Rome, King Jesus does not lead his Kingdom by coercive power and lording it over others. No! He leads through humble, compassionate service. Furthermore, Jesus's kingdom is not established and kept in place through violence and bloodshed. Indeed, his kingdom, the peaceable kingdom, is established, and kept in place through love and compassion, peace with justice. However, Jesus's kingdom is not simply about social justice and the shape of society. Individuals matter to God and Jesus as well. As liberal theologians of the 19th century constantly emphasized, the Bible affirms the infinite value of individual persons. As King, Jesus includes all persons and excludes no one. King Jesus caters to the needs of the poor, the destitute, the hungry, the sick and the outcast. That's how King Jesus operates his realm.

You know, with Covid surrounding us, my wife Donna and I have been hunkering down at home, watching more than our fair share of movies on TV in the evenings. One of the unintended consequences of Covid for me is that I've actually started to enjoy those sappy, romantic Hallmark movies! We watch one almost every night! I can hardly believe it! We've also been watching our share of children's movies such as *Cinderella*, *Zootopia* and most recently the Disney animated version of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*.

Why do we watch and re-watch these movies? Because of the values they impart to children both young and old. *Cinderella* reminds us over and over to "have courage and be kind." *Zootopia* encourages us to pursue our dreams and never give up – indeed, a diminutive, gentle, female bunny can actually become a great Police officer in the big city of *Zootopia*! And the *Hunchback of Notre Dame*? Listen to the words of a beautiful song sung by a Gypsy, an outcast named Esmeralda. Like Quasimodo, the outcast hunchback, she too has taken refuge – sanctuary - in the cathedral of Notre Dame. While observing and overhearing some of the wealthy, powerful patrons of Paris praying in the cathedral, she begins to sing a hauntingly beautiful song titled *God Help the Outcasts*. Listen carefully to the words she sings.

"I don't know if you can hear me. Or if You're even there.

I don't know if You would listen. It's a Gypsy's prayer.

Yes, I know I'm just an outcast. I shouldn't speak to You.

Still I see Your face and wonder. Were You once an outcast too?

God help the outcasts. Hungry from birth.
Show them the mercy. They don't feel on earth.
God help my people! We look to You still.
God help the outcast. Where nobody will."

At this point in her song, the wealthy patrons who have been praying in the pews begin to file past Esmeralda out the cathedral doors. They're singing:

"I ask for wealth. I ask for fame.
I ask for glory to shine on my name.
I ask for love. I can possess.
I ask for God and his angels to bless."

Esmeralda then picks up her song:

"Please help my people. The poor and down trod.
I thought we all were the children of God.
God help the outcasts. Children of God."

I can't help but notice the similarity of themes in Esmeralda's song and Mary's *Magnificat*. Where does King Jesus reveal himself? As today's scripture from Matthew 25 points out - In the faces of the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger and those without adequate clothing, the sick and the prisoner. If you want to see Christ the King today, look into the faces of these children of God. And if you want to see the Kingdom of God on earth, Christ's Kingdom is revealed whenever and wherever the hungry are fed and the thirsty offered drink. Christ's Kingdom continues to break into our world today, whenever we welcome the stranger, the immigrant, the foreigner, the outsider. Whenever those in need are provided clothing. In visiting the sick and those in prison. There! That's where you'll see Christ's Kingdom breaking into the world.

When members of our church and community last Saturday dropped off more than 300 bags of groceries so that our local Salvation Army can feed the hungry...guess what. Christ's Kingdom was breaking in. On that same day when our youth collected a car full...yes a car full of new warm socks and underwear for the homeless at Hesus House in Aurora...guess what. Christ's Kingdom was breaking in! When a dozen or so of our volunteers prepare food and deliver it to

the homeless at Hesed House each month...guess what. Christ's Kingdom is breaking into our world...through us!

This Thursday as we celebrate Thanksgiving holiday, yes, let's be thankful for God's many blessings to us. But above all, let's remember that Christ's Kingdom breaks into the world through us. We are the hands and feet , arms and voice of the risen Christ who works through us to build his Kingdom. Be thankful...and give. Give yourself – your time, talents and treasure to help those in need. For that's where you will encounter Christ the King, and build his Kingdom! Amen.

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Marcus J. Borg. *The Heart of Christianity: Rediscovering a Life of Faith*. Harper SanFrancisco, 2003, pp. 132, 133.