

SERMON
Christ the King
November 22, 2009

Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14
Psalm 93
Revelation 1:4b-8
John 18:33-37

Brothers and sisters in Christ, grace to you and peace from God the Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus, who is the Christ. Amen.

Do any of you remember the game show “Name that Tune?” Contestants listened to short renditions of musical selections and then were asked to “Name that tune.” I was always amazed at how good people were in recalling the names of some of those tunes.

Well, today, I decided to give you an opportunity to “Name that Tune.” I am going to have Zane play a short musical selection and I want you to name it. (Play; “Hail to the Chief”) Do you recognize it? That’s right, it’s “Hail to the Chief.”

This song was published in the United States in about the year 1812. It was first played to announce the arrival of the President on March 4, 1837 when it accompanied Martin Van Buren’s inauguration.

This musical piece serves to create a sense of Pomp and Circumstance. It helps our elected representative look “Presidential.” Now, can anyone tell me the words to this song?

Here they are: “Hail to the chief we have chosen for the nation. Hail to the chief we salute him, one and all. Hail to the chief as we pledge cooperation. In proud fulfillment of a great noble call. Yours is the aim to make this grand country grander. This you will do, that’s our strong, firm belief. Hail to the one we selected as commander. Hail to the president. Hail to the chief.”

This song has been played for presidents since 1837 up to and including our current president. Now, depending on your political viewpoint, you might find this song harder to sing for some presidents than others. But nevertheless, this song lifts up those who we have elected to serve as the leader of this land we call, the United States of America.

Lately, I have been thinking about politics in our country. It seems that politics dominates most of our venues of communication, even though our presidential election took place over a year ago. The media is now already talking about the next election that will take place in three years.

There are political radio programs, political television shows, political advertisements, political newspapers, political pundits, political editorials, political lobbyists, and of course, the political spin doctors.

Although I appreciate living in a democracy, I can't help but think that it might be better to just go back to having a king. It would be a heck of a lot easier. A king, after all, is trained from birth on how to wave, and how to speak, and how to govern.

Now just think about it for a moment. There would be no more of this, on the job training stuff. No more of this campaigning for the office. No more of those obnoxious television ads. No more of these political parties who do everything they can to destroy each other.

All we would have is the royal family. And when the king (or queen) dies, we just follow the next family member in line. Our next leader would be chosen by blood.

Of course, as you know, there are not many true kingdoms left in the world today. Even where there are kings, they have basically lost all of the power and authority that kings once had. These days, it is sometimes difficult even to recognize a king because very often they dress and behave just like every one else.

There is a story about the king of one of the monarchies in Europe. One Sunday, on a trip through his kingdom, he decided to attend worship at a small country church. He was all by himself.

After entering, he sat down quietly and began to pray. Suddenly, a woman came in and interrupted him. She claimed that he was occupying her seat and told him to move somewhere else. So, he quietly moved to another pew without saying a word and sat down again.

At the end of the worship service the minister announced the presence of the king and asked him to say a few words. That woman must have felt really embarrassed – not because she did not recognize the king, but because of the way she had treated him.

This is the same question we as Christians face today. First of all, do we see ourselves as part of a kingdom? And if so, who is our King? And then, how do we treat a king? Of course the correct answer is that Jesus is our king. But to be honest with you, I really struggle with this. After all, what does it really mean for us to name Jesus as King?

Consider what we have done to the earthly kings of our day and age. We regard no one as better than us just because of their blood line. We regard no one as having ultimate authority over us. There is no one that we pledge our unquestioning obedience to.

Recently, there was a big controversy when our President greeted the Emperor of Japan by bowing. Did he bow too low? Was he just showing respect? Or was he giving the impression that he was somehow subservient to the Emperor?

In reality, we Americans do not know what to do, or how to act when it comes to royalty. So instead, we have reduced royalty to the status of soap opera stars. We enjoy reading about royalty in the tabloids.

Therefore, the image of Jesus as King is an image that is hard for us to get hold of. It is an image that is hard to take seriously. It is, I believe for most of us, a fantasy image. An image that belongs to stories that begin with the words “Once upon a time, in a land far far away...”

In our Gospel story today, Pilate asks Jesus if he is the king of the Jews. You see, Pilate only knew one kind of king. A king was one with power and authority. Pilate served the most powerful king in the world, Caesar. A king had servants and subjects that would bow to his every whim. A king had an army that would go into battle for the good of the kingdom.

So this itinerate preacher from Nazareth that was brought before him was confusing for Pilate. Jesus certainly did not look like a king. The very idea that the bruised and beaten man that stood before him could be taken for a king must have seemed ridiculous to Pilate.

But Jesus says to him; “My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews.”

If you think about it, isn't that good news for us. For worldly kingdoms come and go. Worldly kingdoms become corrupt. Worldly kingdoms are greedy and prideful. But Jesus is not a worldly king.

In the kingdom that Jesus is talking about, the king exercises his power in a totally different way – by serving others, by loving others, by forgiving others, by healing others, by giving to others, and finally by sacrificing his life for others.

His power is the power of truth, the power of faith, the power of hope, the power of love – the power of life itself.

This power expresses itself through the church that Jesus established. His kingdom comes to us through the hearing of the word and the receiving of the sacraments.

I find it interesting that there are those who call the church a volunteer organization. But how volunteer can it be when we follow a king?

You see, Jesus is not looking for volunteers. He is looking for subjects. He is looking for servants who will give their all for him. "If anyone wants to follow me, they must take up their cross daily and follow me."

Do you remember as a child watching the Hollywood movies about knights and maidens? There would be a scene where the knights bowed before their king and vowed allegiance. Their life, their wealth, their hearts were forevermore the kings to command.

Just a fantasy you say. Just a movie for children, you think. But isn't this what we pray every Sunday when we say "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done. On earth, as it is in heaven."

So it is. As Christians we live in constant tension. When Jesus came to earth, he brought with him the kingdom of God. Therefore his kingdom has already come in the person of Jesus. Yet it has not come in its fullness. That will not happen until Jesus returns as he promised. So where does that leave us in the mean time?

In the mid-17th century, Oliver Cromwell traveled to another country on some important, state business. One night during his travels, he found he was unable to sleep. According to an old custom, a servant slept in his room to attend to any needs he might have during the night.

That evening the servant was sleeping soundly. In the middle of the night, the secretary woke the man up to tell the servant that he could not sleep.

He said; “I am so afraid that something will go wrong with the diplomatic mission.” “Master” said the servant, “may I ask you a couple of questions?” “Of course” said Cromwell. “Did God rule the world before we were born?” “Most certainly he did”.

The servant continued; “And will God rule the world after we are dead?” “There is no doubt about it”. “Then master, why not let God rule the present, too?” The servant’s reply renewed Cromwell’s faith and gave him a deep sense of peace. In a few minutes both were sound asleep.

On this last Sunday of the church year, we celebrate Jesus as our King. We proclaim that the one who is the alpha and omega is also the one who weeps at the tomb of Lazarus. The one who defies the earthly kings of his day is also the one who welcomes small children.

On this day, we proclaim his kingdom where the first shall be last and the last shall be first. On this day, we speak of power in weakness, strength in loss, and life in giving it away. On this day, we claim that in the midst of all of the powers and principalities of this earth, Jesus is the one who offers us life through God’s mercy and forgiveness.

Despite the claims of the world, this day is a shout to all, that true power belongs to God. On this day we give witness to our trust that God’s power has been offered on behalf of the powerless and the vulnerable.

This day is a confession and a claim that God is fashioning a new kingdom, right here – right now, where all peoples and all nations and all languages will be as one. On this day we claim Christ as king – yesterday, today, and forevermore. Amen.

May the peace that passes all understanding be with you now and for life everlasting.
Amen.

Do all of you like to play games? What are some of your favorite games?

When I was a kid I used to play a game called “King of the Hill”. Have any of you ever played that game before?

We used to play it on the big snow banks that would be at the bottom of our driveway in the wintertime. But we don’t have many snow banks here do we? But you really don’t need a snow bank to play the game, you can do it on any kind hill.

How it works is that whoever makes it to the top of the hill first is the King. But then everyone else tries to climb up the hill and knock that person off so that they can be the king.

Do any of you know what it means to be a king? A king has power and money and lives in a big castle. Usually people are afraid of the king because a king can do whatever he wants. Some countries in the world still have kings, did you know that?

But just like when I played “King of the Hill”, kings come and go. Either they die or someone throws them out so that they can be king.

Well today, we celebrate a special day at church. Do any of you know what day that is? It is called “Christ the King”.

On this day we celebrate that Jesus is our king, and Jesus will be king forever.

Now do you think that Jesus will be like the typical king who has a lot of money and power and lives in a big castle and wants everyone to take care of him?

No, Jesus is a king that loves us and takes care of us. Jesus is a king that would even die for us. Isn’t that the kind of king we would want? Let us pray.....