

The Sunday Missive – November 20, 2022

The Feast of Christ the King

Hymn 616 Hail to the Lord's Anointed

Hail to the Lord's Anointed, great David's greater Son!
Hail, in the time appointed, his reign on earth begun!
He comes to break oppression, to set the captive free;
To take away transgression, and rule in equity.

He comes with succor speedy to those who suffer wrong,
To help the poor and needy, and bid the weak be strong;
To give them songs for sighing, their darkness turn to light,
Whose souls, condemned and dying, were precious in his sight.

He shall come down like showers upon the fruitful earth,
And love, joy, hope, like flowers, spring in his path to birth;
Before him on the mountains shall peace, the herald, to;
And righteousness in fountains from hill to valley flow.

O'er every foe victorious, he on his throne shall rest,
From age to age more glorious, all blessing and all blest;
The tide of time shall never his covenant remove;
His Name shall stand for ever, his changeless Name of Love.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OvwxekWy6kw>

The Collect of the Day

Almighty and everlasting God, whose will it is to restore all things
in your well-beloved Son, the King of kings and Lord of lords:
Mercifully grant that the peoples of the earth, divided and
enslaved by sin, may be freed and brought together under his
most gracious rule; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy
Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Jeremiah 23:1-6

Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! says the Lord. Therefore, thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, concerning the shepherds who shepherd my people: It is you who have scattered my flock, and have driven them away, and you have not attended to them. So, I will attend to you for your evil doings, says the Lord. Then I myself will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the lands where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply. I will raise up shepherds over them who will shepherd them, and they shall not fear any longer, or be dismayed, nor shall any be missing, says the Lord.

The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. And this is the name by which he will be called: "The Lord is our righteousness."

Psalm 46

God is our refuge and strength* ***Our very present help in trouble.***

Therefore we will not fear, though the earth be moved* ***And though the mountains be toppled into the depths of the sea.***

Though its waters rage and foam* ***And the mountains tremble at its tumult.***

The Lord of hosts is with us* ***The God of Jacob is our stronghold.***

There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God* ***The holy habitation of the Most High.***

God is in the midst of her; she shall not be overthrown* ***God shall help her at the break of day.***

The nations make much ado, and the kingdoms are shaken* ***God has spoken, and the earth shall melt away.***

The Lord of hosts is with us* ***The God of Jacob is our stronghold.***

Come now and look upon the works of the Lord* ***What awesome things God has done on earth.***

Who breaks the bow, and shatters the spear* ***And burns the shields with fire.***

Be still, then, and know that I am God* ***I will be exalted among the nations; I will be exalted in the earth."***

The Lord of hosts is with us* ***The God of Jacob is our stronghold.***

Colossians 1:11-20

May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers-- all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to

dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.

Hymn 458 My song is love unknown

My song is love unknown, my Savior's love to me,
Love to the loveless shown that they might lovely be.

O who am I, that for my sake
My Lord should take frail flesh, and die?

He came from his blest throne salvation to bestow,
But men made strange, and none
The longed-for Christ would know.
But O my friend, my friend indeed,
Who at my need his life did spend.

In life no house, no home my Lord on earth might have;
In death no friendly tomb but what a stranger gave.
What may I say? Heaven was his home;
But mine the tomb wherein he lay.

Here might I stay and sing, no story so divine;
Never was love, dear King, never was grief like thine.
This is my friend, in whose sweet praise
I all my days could gladly spend.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HMart4wXsI0>

Luke 23:33-43

When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what

they are doing." And they cast lots to divide his clothing. The people stood by, watching Jesus on the cross; but the leaders scoffed at him, saying, "He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!" The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine, and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!" There was also an inscription over him, "This is the King of the Jews."

One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, "Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!" But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong." Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." He replied, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

Christ The Un-King C

This is the Feast of Christ the King -- that announcement is as puzzling as it is glorious. For us, the idea of having a king is a dubious one to say the least.

The actual feast day was established by Pope Pius XI – a fascinating and heroic figure who struggled mightily with growing fascist movements. In 1925 he thought it would be a good message to send: Mussolini may be our dictator, but Christ is our King. And in a brave challenge to worldly power, he declared that the primary allegiance for all Christian people is to God, and thenceforth there would be an official day every year to remind everybody of the fact. So that when we say “Thy kingdom come,” we might remember that we’re talking about something as real as it is atypical. Popes can do that sort of declaring. It didn’t stop the horrors of fascism, and what’s worse, when Pius died, his successor decided to ‘go along to get along’ with the Nazis, but at least it helped keep the seeds of hope from dying in the fires of

holocaust and war. Anglicans and others along with the Roman Catholics have kept the feast day as a reminder of our truer allegiance.

What can it mean for us, this long and powerful tradition of Jesus' reign, his being the King of the Jews, the King of Kings, and the King Eternal? What can these associations do to orient us towards God? The number of worldly kings has dwindled down to a precious few – although one more than last year. The ones who are called monarchs tend to be more ceremonial than dictatorial, and generate more interest through their social and domestic activities (and shenanigans) than their pronouncements. Heads of state and powermongers – near and far -- who do things the way queens and kings used to do them are mostly pretending to be duly elected and widely supported by people they control with force or fear or both. There are plenty of them and they are making plenty trouble.

Nowadays our idea of royalty is more romantic than foundational, more likely to conjure up a storybook character in the past than a single living person who orders all the other people around. And a very good thing that is, too. Better a Prom Queen than a Maleficent or Voldemort. Anybody who believes otherwise should go see *Hamilton* again. Christ the King must always be very different indeed from any other to have our allegiance and affection.

Jesus is very reluctant to be called a King. To the question, "Are you a king?" he answers Pilate, "You say so." He doesn't sound as if he's trying to prove a powerful point. He doesn't say, "You bet your life I'm a King...I'm the King!" And the kingdom he presides over is pretty loosely run; it's borders are open to anybody, and the prevailing attitude seems to be one of humility, not triumph. It's a wonderland, where the rule of love takes precedence over the rule of law.

Part of why Jesus hesitates to claim the title is that this kingdom is as yet more expected than established on spaceship Earth. Who knows? Perhaps there is another place and planet out in the vastness where Jesus appeared and everyone right away said, "Ah yes, here is the solution!" And have been living like that ever since. Was he there right before he came here, and it made him expect better treatment from us? Or did he go there right after the ascension, in search of greener pastures? Perhaps that incarnation was as Jesusita, which made all the difference, and they have been living happily ever since. It leaves you with all kinds of ideas.

Unlike most kings of this World, Jesus' appearance was brief. He was born in a cow shed and rode to his triumph on a burro. His sayings are difficult to understand, often downright exasperating: "The last shall be first; Turn the other cheek; if someone asks for your coat, give them your cloak, too; sell what you have, give the money to the poor and follow me." They are what you might call extravagantly counter-instinctive. It seems like you'd have to be a fool to follow such advice.

But this whole enterprise of God's is about love, not power. And most of us struggle to comprehend, let alone embrace such an orientation. As Richard Rohr has observed, "In fact, we cannot understand it in the least, unless we 'stand under' it, like a cup beneath a waterfall. When we truly understand Divine Love, our politics, our anthropology, our economics, and our movements for justice will all change."

As our cup overflows, we come to realize that the power of love does not flow because we become good; it comes to help us become better. Love creates the possibility that we might turn away from violence and injustice despite our propensities. Rohr goes on: "For some reason, we think that if we love God, God will love us. When, in reality, it is because God loves us that we can return the compliment. God does not love us because we are good; God loves us because God is good."

We come to realize that God's foolishness is a better beacon than human wisdom. We observe that coming to God as unlearned children – even though it might seem a little foolish – is what God wants. And so we seek to follow this very different kind of king and become fools for love.

This can be especially hard for us Americans. After all, our nation was founded on the renunciation of kingship and demagoguery, and we tend to be reluctant, even cynical about letting someone tell us how to behave. Moreover, we tend to be dissatisfied with the why and wherefore of pure ideas – such as all persons are created equal -- and this waffling has led to plenty of horrors. We withhold our commitments: to each other, to our communities, and to the well-being of other nations until we determine the exact degree of benefit to ourselves; and it had better be high. So our commitments remain tentative, or altogether absent.

But no one has ever failed who has truly tried to follow the king called Christ, even though their lives may have been uneventful or wrongly served. Because this king makes only one royal commandment: "Commit to love first, ask questions later."

As Jesus puts it, the only unredeemable thing is to deny the spirit of love. Today is the day we prepare to begin another year by declaring our allegiance to this very different king; one with very different ideas of power. Because our images of kingship have taken on a storybook quality that makes practical acceptance and discipleship, let alone submission seem ephemeral and very hard to grasp, how can we possibly prepare? Perhaps we would do well by remembering the Sufi proverb, "It is not the solid wood that can become a flute; it is the empty reed."

Jesus' life and words are the description, the user manual for this strange, revolutionary kingdom of which we would be part. It is a kingdom of God's making, but of our doing. We must develop

the habit of asking ourselves what truth is, and accepting the answers. Selflessly loving is risky business, it puts us in jeopardy. It's something we might shy away from if we hadn't sworn allegiance to a king who says we have to do it. But jeopardy is the best game: big risks, big payoffs. That is the life of a Christian. God gives us the answers and we each have to experience new questions for ourselves.

Hymn 421 All glory be to God on high

All glory be to God on high, and peace on earth from heaven,
And God's good will unfailingly be to all people given.
We bless, we worship you, we raise for your great glory
Thanks and praise, O God, Almighty Father.

O Lamb of God, Lord Jesus Christ, whom God the Father gave us,
Who for the world was sacrificed upon the cross to save us;
And, as you sit at God's right hand and we for judgement
There must stand, have mercy, Lord, upon us.

You only are the Holy One, who came for our salvation,
And only you are God's true Son, who was before creation.
You, only, Christ, as Lord we own, and with the Spirit, you alone
Share in the Father's glory.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wyktEJPEIcc>

Only One Voice

Only one voice,
but it was singing
and the words danced and as they danced held high —
oh, with what grace! — their lustrous bowls of joy.
Even in the dark we knew they danced, but we —
none of us — touched the hem of what would happen.
Somewhere around a whirl, swirl, a pirouette,
the bowls flew and spilled,
and we were drenched, drenched to the dry bone
in our miserable night.

Only one voice,
but morning lay awake in her bed and listened,
and then was out and racing over the hills
to hear and see.
And water and light and air and the tall trees
and people, young and old, began to hum
the catchy, catchy tune.
And everyone danced, and everyone, everything,
even the last roots of the doddering oak
believed in life.

Jessica Powers