

The Sunday Missive -- November 21, 2021
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 mountainsshall peace, the herald, to;
And righteousness in fountains from hill to valley flow.

O'er every foe victorious, he on his thone 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=4zbqniKw48c>

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.**

2 Samuel 23:1-7

Now these are the last words of David: The oracle of David, son of Jesse, the oracle of the man whom God exalted, the anointed of the God of Jacob, the favorite of the Strong One of Israel: The spirit of the Lord speaks through me, his word is upon my tongue. The God of Israel has spoken, the Rock of Israel has said to me: 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. Is not my house like this with God? For he has made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and secure. Will he not cause to prosper all my help and my desire? But the godless are all like thorns that are thrown away; for they cannot be picked up with the hand; to touch them one uses an iron bar or the shaft of a spear. And they are entirely consumed in fire on the spot.

Psalm 132

O Lord, remember in David's favor all the hardships he endured*
How he swore to the Lord and vowed to the Mighty One of Jacob,

"I will not enter my house or get into my bed* I will not give sleep to my eyes or slumber to my eyelids,

Until I find a place for the Lord* A dwelling place for the Mighty One of Jacob."

Rise up, O Lord, and go to your resting place* You and the ark of your might.

Let your priests be clothed with righteousness* And let your faithful shout for joy.

For the Lord has chosen Zion* He has desired it for his habitation:

I will abundantly bless its provisions* I will satisfy its poor with bread.

Its priests I will clothe with salvation* And its faithful will shout for joy.

There I will cause a horn to sprout up for David* I have prepared a lamp for my anointed one.

His enemies I will clothe with disgrace* But on him, his crown will gleam."

Revelation 1:4-8

John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood, and made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. Look! He is coming with the clouds; every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and on his account all the tribes of the earth will wail. So it is to be. Amen. "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.

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.

 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=MHh9sxjBUzo>

John 18:33-37

Then Pilate entered the headquarters^{*} again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, ‘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 the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?’ Jesus answered, ‘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. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here.’ Pilate asked him, ‘So you are a king?’ Jesus answered, ‘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.’

Christ The King – Last Pent B

“Lo! who comes with clouds descending; every eye will see, even those who crucified; and because of God, all the tribes of the earth will wail. So it is to be. Amen.” This is the Feast of Christ the King. That announcement is as puzzling as it is glorious. For us, the idea of a king is a mixed up one to say the least.

For the people of Israel, the concept of kingship was fundamental. The inauguration of a monarchy was a great stride in the history of the Hebrew people. After a bit of a false start with Saul and his son, Samuel anoints David, the man whom God exalted, the anointed of the God of Jacob, the favorite of the Strong One of Israel. Today we heard David's oracle, his last words: "The spirit of the Lord speaks through me, his word is upon my tongue. The Rock of Israel 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.' But the godless are all like thorns that are thrown away." But by Jesus' time, the King of Israel was a wobbly puppet, an angry, vindictive bully amongst a people under the merciless rule of Rome.

The only apparent means of survival were to appease the Romans and manipulate their systems for personal power and gain. Thus when Jesus appears, representing and advocating a return to God's rule, the authorities turn themselves inside out to try to get rid of him. They took Jesus to Pilate's headquarters early in the morning. They themselves did not enter, so as to avoid ritual defilement. But Pilate called their bluff: "What is this man accused of?" Confused by their fears and self-righteous anger, how desperately ashamed must they have been to answer: "Well, if he weren't a criminal, we wouldn't have arrested him, now would we?" They could hardly say, 'We don't like the truth he represents, so we want to get rid of him.' But that's what was going on.

Societies are still chillingly prone to incarcerating, expelling and eliminating people whose existence makes us uncomfortable. John's Gospel talks a lot about "The Jews said this," and "The Jews did that." It would have been a great deal more helpful if John had written, as did Mark, "The leaders said this," and "The crowds did that." Rule 1 of reading the Bible is: "The Jews-R-Us." Gee when I see that on the page, it looks like R U.S.

Inayat Khan observes: "This state of things has existed in all ages. Blinded by conventions and by the laws of his time and the

customs of his people, man has ignored and opposed the truth. Yet at the same time the truth has never failed to make its impression upon the soul, because the soul of all is one soul, and truth is one truth under whatever religion it is hidden. The great weakness of humankind has been that only what we are accustomed to consider as truth do we take to be truth, and anything we have not been accustomed to hear or think frightens us. We react in fear instead of responding to truth. Just like a person in a strange land, away from home, the soul is a stranger to the nature of things it is not accustomed to. But the journey to perfection means rising above limitations, rising so high that not only the horizon of one country, of one continent, is seen, but that of the whole world. The higher we rise, the wider becomes the horizon of our view."

Pilate won't go along with them. "He's one of your people, take him yourselves and deal with him according to your own justice." "But, but, but we're not permitted to put anyone to death." You can almost hear the silence hanging in the air. "So, let me get this straight, you want me to do it for you instead?"

"We can't kill anybody," they say. "It's against our religion. But yes, we sure do wish you would do it for us, Mr. Pontius Pilate." I don't recall ever hearing anyone describe Pontius Pilate as a role model, but he does set one thinking for a moment when he asks, "What is truth." At first we hear it as a flippant, cruel and highly inappropriate remark with someone's life at stake. But it's actually a good question, one that we could stand to ask ourselves more often. And Jesus himself asks the same thing in another way: "Who do you say that I am?" In other words, "Do you get it? Do you get who I am? I am what I am. I am truth."

Jesus is very reluctant to call himself a King. To the question, "Are you a king?" he answers, "You say so," and "My kingdom is not of this world." He doesn't sound as if he's trying to prove a powerful point; he doesn't say, "You're darn right I'm a King...I am the King." The kingdom he describes has pretty open borders. It's available to anybody, and the prevailing attitude seems to be one of humility, not triumph.

Jesus' worldly reign was brief. He was born in a cow shed and rode to his coronation on a burro. Wearing the crown he did obtain – made of thorns -- was physical torture. His sayings can be difficult to understand, often downright exasperating: The last shall be first; Turn the other cheek; If someone asks for your coat, give them also your cloak. His ideas are what you might call extravagantly counter-instinctive. You'd have to be a fool to follow this advice.

But we have come to realize that God's foolishness is a better beacon than human wisdom. We have observed that coming to God as little children – even though it might be a little foolishly – is what goodness requires. So we seek to follow this very different kind of king and ourselves become fools for love.

This can be especially hard for us modern Americans. Our nation was founded on the renunciation of kingship, and we tend to be reluctant, even cynical about letting someone outside ourselves care for us and tell us how to behave. We tend to be dissatisfied with the why and wherefore of ideas, especially truths that adjure us to change. We withhold our commitments, to each other, to our communities, and to the well-being of other nations and the planet as a whole until we determine the exact benefit to ourselves. But exact benefits can never be determined; which results in us withholding a lot.

The answer to Pilate's question, 'What is truth?' is actually available: No one has been shown to fail who has followed this king Christ, whose only royal commandment is: "Commit to love first, ask questions later." The only unredeemable thing is to deny the spirit of unconditional love. Today is the day we prepare to begin another year by declaring our allegiance to this very different king with his very different kind of power.

It is a kingdom like no other – one no human beings have experienced or even well-imagined – but we do have the necessary instructions. And we have the age old promise: "Heed

me and walk in my ways; at once I will turn my hand against your enemies, and fill your mouth with honey from the rock!" Jesus as God's self is the descriptor, the user manual for this strange, revolutionary kingdom of which we would be part. But the precepts and parables all demand our attention, our interpretation and our acceptance in order to make sense and be put into action. It is a kingdom of God's making, but very much of our doing.

The Prayers of the People

Let us give thanks for all God's gifts so freely bestowed upon us:
For the beauty and wonder of your creation, in earth and sky and sea. **We thank you, Lord.**

For all that is gracious in our lives; all that reveals to us the image of Christ, **We thank you, Lord.**

For our daily food and drink, our homes and families, and our friends, **We thank you, Lord.**

For minds to think, and hearts to love, and hands to serve,
We thank you, Lord.

For health and strength to work, and leisure to rest and play,
We thank you, Lord.

For the brave and courageous, who are patient in suffering and faithful in adversity, **We thank you, Lord.**

For all valiant seekers after truth, liberty, and justice,
We thank you, Lord.

For the communion of saints, in all times and places, for all the faithful, **We thank you, Lord.**

Above all, we give thanks for the great mercies and promises

given to us in Christ Jesus our Lord; to him be praise and glory, with you, O Father, and the Holy Spirit, now and for ever. **Amen.**

I ask your prayers this day for all who are in any sickness, need or any kind of trouble, especially Karen, Katharine, Kelli, Gail, are there others? _____, and all those we hold in our hearts this day. For all those in distress and mourning.

I ask your prayers this day for those who have died, especially those we name now, silently or aloud _____ Pray for the faithful departed. **Amen.**

Offertory Anthem -- A Prayer for This House

by Louis Untermeyer and Alan Boehmer

May nothing evil cross this door,
And may ill fortune never pry about these windows;

May the roar and rain go by.

Strengthen'd by faith, these rafters will withstand the batt'ring of
the storm;

This hearth, though all the world grow chill, will keep us warm.

Peace shall walk softly through these rooms,
Touching our lips with holy wine,
'Till every casual corner blooms into a shrine.

May God bless all who live within,
May each one strive to help and comfort one another

As the winds of change blow on.
Laughter shall drown the raucous shout.
And though these shelt'ring walls be thin,
May they be strong to keep hate out,
And hold love in.

Hymn 544 Jesus shall reign where'er the sun

Jesus shall reign where'er the sun
Doth his successive journeys run;
His kingdom stretch from shore to shore,
Till moons shall wax and wane no more.

To him shall endless prayer be made,
And praises throng to crown his head;
His Name like sweet perfume shall rise
With every morning sacrifice.

People and realms of every tongue
Dwell on his love with sweetest song;
And infant voices shall proclaim
Their early blessings on his Name.

Let every creature rise and bring
Peculiar honors to our King;
Angels descend with songs again,
And earth repeat the loud amen!

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

Grace to you and peace from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of all the kings of the earth. Now to the one who offers us love and has made us to be a universal kingdom in lives of charity, to that one be glory and dominion forever and ever. And thus the blessing of God Almighty, Creator, Redeemer, Sanctifier be with you this day and remain with you always. **Amen.**

In the Meantime

The river rose wildly every seventh spring or so, and down the hatch went the town, just a floating hat box or two, a cradle, a cellar door like an ark to float us back into the story of how we drown but never for good, or long. How the ornate numbers of the bank clock filled with flood, how we scraped minute by minute the mud from the hours and days until the gears of time started to catch and count again. Calamity is how the story goes, how we built the books of the Bible. Not the one for church, but the one the gods of weather inscribed into our shoulder blades and jawbones to grant them grit enough to work the dumb flour of day into bread and breath again. The world has a habit of ending, every grandmother and father knew well enough never to say, so deeply was it stained into the brick and mind. We live in the meantime is how I remember the length of twilight and late summer cicadas grinding the air into what seemed like unholy racket to us, but for them was the world's only music.

Max Garland

