

The Rev. Duane A. Jesse, Senior Pastor
Zion Lutheran Church, Youngstown, Ohio

Weekend of Sunday, November 21, 2021
Christ the King/Lectionary 34/Proper 29/Year B
First Reading: Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14
Second Reading: Revelation 1:4b-8
Gospel Reading: John 18:33-37
Sermon Title: “All Hail King Jesus!”

Theme

Even after Israel had experienced the vagaries of kings, the people still longed for a true king to set things right. He would have the king’s title of Anointed One (Messiah); he would be the “one like a human being” (Son of Man) given dominion in Daniel’s vision. Jesus is given these titles, even though he is nothing like an earthly king. His authority comes from the truth to which he bears witness, and those who recognize the truth voluntarily listen to him. We look forward to the day he is given dominion, knowing his victory will be the nonviolent victory of love.

Texts

First Reading: Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14

⁹As I watched,
thrones were set in place,
 and an Ancient One took his throne,
his clothing was white as snow,
 and the hair of his head like pure wool;
his throne was fiery flames,
 and its wheels were burning fire.

¹⁰A stream of fire issued
 and flowed out from his presence.
A thousand thousands served him,
 and ten thousand times ten thousand stood attending him.

The court sat in judgment,
 and the books were opened.

¹³As I watched in the night visions,
I saw one like a human being
 coming with the clouds of heaven.
And he came to the Ancient One
 and was presented before him.

¹⁴To him was given dominion
and glory and kingship,
that all peoples, nations, and languages
should serve him.
His dominion is an everlasting dominion
that shall not pass away,
and his kingship is one
that shall never be destroyed.

Second Reading: Revelation 1:4b-8

^{4b}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, ⁵and 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, ⁶and made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

⁷Look! 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.

⁸“I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.

Gospel: John 18:33-37

³³Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” ³⁴Jesus answered, “Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?” ³⁵Pilate 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?” ³⁶Jesus 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.” ³⁷Pilate 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.”

Sermon

The festival of Christ the King was only established by the Roman Catholic Church in 1925. It has several variants to that name including simply, Christ the King in the Lutheran churches of the ELCA. As recently as 1970, the Church moved the feast day to the last Sunday of "Ordinary Time," that season we call Pentecost.

Now you might be thinking, "Why does the church need a special day to celebrate Jesus as Christ the King when we celebrate Jesus every day?" I am so glad you asked. I understand your question, and it is worthy of an answer.

The thought of such a celebration is threefold. Christians recognize that

- 1) Since Jesus Christ is "consubstantial" (i.e., one with) his Heavenly Father (John 10:30), and because all creation came into being through him (John 1:3), therefore he has supreme and absolute dominion over all creation and therefore, is king over all creation.
- 2) Furthermore, because Christ is our redeemer, having purchased us by paying the price for our sin, we are no longer our own property, but his. Therefore it follows that all creation is subject to him. (1 John 2:2)
- 3) And finally, God, Jesus' Heavenly Father, bestowed upon Christ all the nations of the world as his special possession and dominion. (Matthew 28:18)

In keeping with the intent of the festival day, the lectionary prescribes readings that affirm this theme of Jesus Christ as not only *our* king but *the* king of *all creation*.

In nearly twenty-five years of preaching, I have never preached on the Book of Daniel. Maybe I have referred to a passage once or twice, but no more than that. However, on this Christ the King Sunday, I am intrigued.

The Book of Daniel was written around 165 BCE, during a time of great unrest in Europe and the Middle East, and the only detail of that period that matters for my purpose today is that Israel was not a sovereign nation; one occupying nation after another ruled over it.

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Apocalypse (ἀποκάλυψις, *apokálypsis*) ~revelation", "an unveiling or unfolding of things not previously known and which could not be known apart from the unveiling"

The Book of Daniel is a literary style known as "Apocalyptic" and is a genre of prophetic writing. *Apocalypse* (ἀποκάλυψις, *apokálypsis*) is a Greek word meaning "revelation", "an unveiling or unfolding of things not previously known and which could not be known apart from the unveiling". Although there are elements of apocalyptic writing in many of the books of the Bible, Daniel and Revelation are the preeminent examples of apocalyptic writing. I want you to know that before we look at the passage from Daniel that we have as our First Reading.

Simply stated, the "Ancient One" mentioned in verses nine and thirteen is God the Father. The vision that Daniel was given was just about as *awesome* a figure as can be imagined. Now I know that *awesome* is an over-used word in our culture. My brother gave me tickets to the Ohio State/Michigan State game, and that could be considered an *awesome* gesture. However, *awesome* really means extremely impressive or daunting; inspiring great admiration, apprehension, even fear.

Daniel saw a vision, even more *awesome* than Moses' talking burning bush in Exodus. When the burning bush identified itself as God, Moses fell on the ground to hide his face, because one does not enter into the presence of God and gaze upon God and live (Exodus 3). So the image that Daniel was given and recorded for us is truly *awesome*.

But then, in verse thirteen, Daniel "saw one like a human being" come down out of the clouds and was presented before God, the Ancient One. And about this one, Daniel wrote:

¹⁴To him was given dominion
and glory and kingship,
that all peoples, nations, and languages
should serve him.

His dominion is an everlasting dominion
that shall not pass away,
and his kingship is one
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If this sounds familiar, that is because it is one of the texts that inspire the Hymn of Praise, that part of the liturgy that we sing just before the Prayer of the Day.

This "one like a human being" is, of course, Jesus Christ, though Daniel wouldn't have known his name.

So therefore, in the Book of Daniel, written about 165 years before the Nativity of Jesus and nearly 200 years before the Resurrection of Jesus, God the Father, the Ancient One, gave Daniel a vision to share with the Israelites who were under the rule of a foreign king that "one like a human being" was coming who would rule all creation as king.

We might think that the Gospel selection is an odd one to celebrate Christ the King. I mean by the time Jesus was before Pilate, he was already badly beaten nearly to death – hardly kingly looking. Pilate was not amused by the shenanigans of the Jewish Sanhedrin, the leaders of the Temple. He knew it was out of jealousy that they made false accusations about Jesus and called for his death.

Pilate very clearly asked Jesus if he was the king of the Jews. In a roundabout way, Jesus answered Pilate by telling him he was the king of the universe, a concept that Pilate probably couldn't even imagine.

And finally, in the Second Reading from Revelation, another book of apocalyptic writing, the author, presumably the Apostle John, the beloved disciple, prefaced his vision by reminding us of what King Jesus has done, not to earn the title – that was given to him by God his Heavenly Father – but what King Jesus *has done because he is* King Jesus, for no other being in heaven or on earth is, was, or ever will be worthy to be the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. All Hail King Jesus!

Raisin' the Bar Challenge

Brothers and sisters in Christ, we worship God revealed to as "one like a human being", Jesus Christ, every Sunday, all year round. So why do we need a festival day called Christ the King? Because we are mortal and we get caught up in the living of our lives – so blessed are we – and we lose focus on that most important bit of truth.

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Oh sure, we reenact his sacrificial meal every week, but perhaps because we reenact it every week, maybe it might becomes like many of our other daily/weekly rituals – we just go through the motions. How sad that would be, and so once a year, in a way more direct than other worship services, today we are reminded that Jesus Christ is the King of all Creation. And we are reminded why he is King of all Creation, and what he alone could and did do, so that we might be saved. All Hail King Jesus!

Prayer

Almighty God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, out of your great love you created all of creation, and out of all you created, you created us human beings with the unique ability to choose to love you back. And when we chose not to love you back, and to go our own way, you sent your Son, Jesus from his rightful place in Heaven with you, to come down to earth to save us from ourselves. He was always King of Creation, but he revealed himself to us through his life of preaching and teaching and performing signs and miracles, and more pointedly through his sacrificial death and life-giving resurrection. Almighty God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we worship you by worshiping him and confess that he is our Lord and King. It is in his name we pray. Amen