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St. Mary the Virgin
The Feast of Christ the King
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Proper 29 C**

I know some people think Christian spirituality and politics don't belong in the same sentence and certainly never in a sermon because, in their opinion, this is not biblical. However, even a cursory knowledge of the contents of the bible reveals an ongoing interplay between politics and the Judeo-Christian dance with God.

I'll spare you the multitude of bible verses that I could quote to make my point. But for those of you who care, look this sermon up on St. Mary's website and you'll find a footnote at the end of this sermon with a few biblical chapter and verses that make the point. *

Certainly our Anglican/Episcopal heritage began with the Roman Church in England becoming, under King Henry VIII, the Anglican Church of England where the monarch, even to this day, carries the title: "Defender of the Faith and Supreme Governor of the Church."

I mention this connection because this particular Sunday is known as "The Feast of Christ the King". The "Collect or prayer for today in today's program speaks of Jesus and the "King of kings and Lord of lords." The scripture lessons appointed to be read today each touch on the theme of "kingship."

The lesson from Jeremiah is a reminder that even though the kings of Israel had been poor shepherds and scattered the flock that was theirs to protect, God would raise up a new king from the lineage of the greatest Hebrew king,

David. This new king would be wise, just, and have a right and holy relationship with God.

In the Letter to the Colossians, St. Paul speaks eloquently of the majesty of Jesus Christ. He is the one who is the head of the body of the Church but more than that. Paul tells us, Jesus is “the image of the invisible God” and even “thrones or dominions or rulers or powers” are “created through him and for him.” This is where the notion comes from that Jesus is the “King of kings.” Kingship comes up in the gospel this morning but not in the way we usually think of monarchs. Jesus is hanging on a cross between two thieves, only a scant couple of hours from death; there with arms outstretched, Jesus is mocked as the “King of the Jews.” Only one criminal takes his kingly authority as reality.

Most of us have a sense of what a monarch is because of the fascination in this country with British monarchs. However for us to understand Jesus as king, we need to grasp a concept of a much different order.

I’m reminded of the man who was driving a refrigerated truck full of 25 penguins to the zoo. Unfortunately just outside of town the truck broke down. The deliveryman was frantic. It was a warm day and the penguins needed to get to the zoo.

The deliveryman flagged down a farmer who was driving a large truck and said, “I’ll give you \$500 to take these penguins to the zoo.” Well this sounded like a good deal to the farmer so he happily agreed. The penguins were loaded into the farmer’s truck and off they all went.

In the mean time, the deliveryman was able to find a mechanic to repair his refrigerated truck. Three hours had passed and the driver decided to check on the penguins before he headed home. As he drove through town he was amazed to see the farmer and all 25 penguins standing in line waiting to get into the matinee at the local movie theater.

The deliveryman jumped out of his truck and approached the farmer.

“What on earth are you doing here? I told you to take these penguins to the zoo.”

“I did take them to the zoo,” replied the farmer. But we had such a good time there and since I had a lot of the money you gave me left over, we decided to go to the movies.”

HEARING the WORDS doesn't guarantee GRASPING the MEANING. Whether we are talking about penguins or the kingship of Jesus.

Speaking of Jesus as King has nothing to do with palaces, or someone who is wealthy, unapproachable, remote, removed, coercive, pampered, prideful and pompous. Jesus was not that sort of king.

Jesus is spoken of as “king” because he had an authority and majesty about himself that others around him, at least the perceptive ones, felt and experienced. Jesus was the “Incarnation,” the enfleshment of the very essence of God, the source of all creation. The term “Incarnation” literally means, “in the flesh.”

Jesus was the “enfleshment” of the love of God. The authority, the majesty, the power, the creativity, the truth of Jesus, all flow from his being intimately

connected to the source of the universe, the divine one who created all that is out of compassionate love.

To know Jesus is more than knowing intellectual concepts. There is a lot of heart knowledge necessary to know who Jesus is. To know Jesus as King of kings, and Lord of lords, is to know a love so grand, so encompassing, so compassionate, so healing, so forgiving, so profound, that we become changed people. This kind of knowing is far more in the “heart” than in the “head.” This is the kind of knowing that invites us to love with the same abandon with which we are loved.

To know the King of kings is to know a love which invites us to speak out in the face of injustice, bigotry and prejudice. To know the King of kings is to know the One who invites us to stretch, to be givers and not just receivers, to be imaginative and daring, willing to do the impossible for the sake of Jesus Christ. Jesus, the King whose love invites each of us to be his ambassadors of reconciling love. His is a love that both embraces us with healing and wholeness and frees us for loving service. This is true no matter what the political situation may be.

Today as we come to the end of the Christian liturgical year, we are reminded that it was a pagan ruler, Pontius Pilate, who gave the order that Jesus, even on the cross, was to be given the title of “King.”

Next Sunday we begin a new liturgical year with the start of Advent, a time when we prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus. Even in birth it was the pagan astronomers and a few lowly shepherds who recognized the Kingship of Jesus.

As we enter the Advent season, be attentive to the one King, the one above all earthly authorities, who would change your heart and open your mind to his Truth. And be alert to the folks in your life who need a word of love and hope, or who would welcome a word of encouragement. That's what our King expects of us and in so doing your heart will swell with a love that comes from the King of Kings. Amen

Romans 13:1-7; I Peter 2:14; I Tim. 2:1-2; Daniel 4:17, 25, 32; Daniel 5:21; John 19:11; Acts 24:25; Matthew 22:17-21; Matthew 28:19; Matte 5:13-16; Titus 3:1