

Lord, make these words Your Word, that our hearts may become Your heart. Amen.

Americans have a thing about royalty – and particularly about commoners who become royalty. Witness the endless fascination with Harry and Meghan. This is also one of our themes Christ-followers – that we, commoners, are really royalty in disguise, just as Jesus was a king in disguise.

On the last Sunday in the Pentecost season, we celebrate Christ as King, the climax of his story before we reset the church clock next week, and start the story again – about Jesus, his entry into our world a vulnerable baby, his life of wandering, always moving in the shadow of His coming cross. Maybe we need to celebrate this truth about Jesus, the light of Christ triumphant, before we enter Advent, that season of darkening days, where the promise of Christ’s coming is just a thin band of light on the horizon.

I always find the post-Daylight Savings Time shift jarring. I don’t like going out at 5 o’clock in the afternoon, and it being dark as midnight. It’s disorienting – something’s wrong, like Darkness has won. Maybe that’s what it was like for Jesus to come in human life – to live in this darkened world, when all he had known was light, when he was light, our saving Daylight, who took on the darkness, for us.

Today we celebrate who Christ truly is, this king who consented to become an embryo and then an infant, born to a young mother in tenuous circumstances. He said he was the Light of the world. But He knew that light would blind us. And so He consented to clothe Himself in flesh, in our human condition, to be limited by our boundedness in time and space. Not just to put on our humanity like a covering – but to fully live in it, not just appearing like a man, becoming one. He didn’t just look like a helpless infant – he was one. He didn’t just look like a criminal nailed to a cross – he died like one. The King of Kings and Lord of Lords became defenseless, for us. In our gospel reading today, that’s what we see – a beaten and defenseless man being interrogated: “Are you a king?” “My kingdom is not from here,” He said. What kind of a kingdom is this? Certainly not the kind our fairy tales have taught us to expect.

Wasn't the kind of king Pilate recognized either, one with any political power. This king looked like no king the world recognizes. This king wasn't in charge of anything, no control over whether he lives or dies. But remember, the way the world thinks things should be is almost always opposite from how Jesus described the Kingdom of God. The Good News of Jesus' Way of Love is always upside down from what we expect. We think of kings and queens as wealthy, living sumptuously; Jesus lived without income, a traveling preacher and healer. We think of kings and queens as wielding power, sometimes absolute power. On Good Friday, Jesus looked like the ultimate loser. But God wasn't finished.

Some people say the Christian message is a fairy tale – but the fairy tale is the notion that power and strength reside in political and financial systems. There was more power in Christ in that interview with Pilate than the Roman governor would ever know... that's why he was so uncomfortable. Pilate was looking for a category to put Jesus into so he could either condemn him or set him free. Pilate didn't recognize him for who he truly was, the Truth.

The world still doesn't recognize him or his Kingdom. Do we? His Kingdom is invisible, but he said it was right here, already come. "The Kingdom of God is among you." or "Within you," he said. Just as you only see the wind by seeing its effect on other things, like trees, so the Kingdom only became visible in his signs of power among people, or when hearts changed, forgiveness and healing were released.

And that's still the way it becomes visible – whenever we act in that realm, that energy field, the Kingdom of God becomes visible. Through us. We may not look any more like royals than Jesus did – but we are. When we are united with Christ in baptism, we are transformed, given a new identity – we take on his royal blood and become princes and princess ourselves, Christ's royal brothers and sisters. Martin Luther described it as "The Great Exchange" – Christ took on our beggars' rags, and gave us his royal robes to wear. The Kingdom of God is among us, my friends – and we are already its royalty. As Christ-followers, we learn to see power in what the world thinks is weakness, to see beauty in what the world deems hideous, to see value in what the world says is worthless.

We have an important function in this world which looks lost,
but which we believe God has saved: We are to be those royal ones in disguise,
moving about the world, quietly bringing hope and resources where they are
needed, shining light into places of darkness.

Where are you called to live as royalty in disguise?

What school or office or kitchen or playing field or garden club or
laboratory or garage or living room needs God's light through you?

What if we started thinking of ourselves the way God sees us –

As royal children? Brothers and sisters of Christ the King?

Put here as agents of the king, to help to spread his kingdom of love?

What if we started walking like royalty, not burdened by our cares and anxieties,
but like, say, Princess Grace, another commoner who became royalty.

Walk as people who know they are beloved, and know they are noble.

That's our inheritance, as sons and daughters of the Truth.

What if we started treating other people the princesses or princes in disguise –
because how do we know?

What if we followed this King of Love into loving service, and live as he did:
yielding instead of insisting;

putting the focus on God instead of claiming it for ourselves.

When you walk out of here today, remember you are royalty, a prince of love,
A princess of love.

And God can't wait to see what you do next.

Amen.

John 18:33-37

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.”

Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14

As 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.

A 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.

As 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.

To 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.**

Revelation 1:4b-8

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.**