

ὁ λόγος παρακλήσεως
Proper 29-B (CTK); 25 November 2018
St. Thomas, Glassboro – Todd Foster
(rev. 2018112240748)

Christ the King

In nomine...

I. Kings

A few years ago I read a book by Robert Johnson entitled *Owning Your Own Shadow*. The premise of this book is that we all have a part of ourselves that we are proud of, that we cultivate and show off. And we also have parts that we are ashamed of or reluctant to make known for whatever reason. We even hide these parts from ourselves! Those hidden parts are the “shadow” or the dark side of the psyche.

Now this shadow self is a big mix of traits. We try to hide our selfishness or our insecurities. We try to avoid picking our noses in public. But we often hide some of our best qualities, too: frightened to make ourselves vulnerable or afraid we will be unable to meet consistently the demands of those qualities.

One line that particularly stuck with me from this book was that, “Our hero-worshiping capacity is pure shadow; in this case our finest qualities are refused and laid on another.... Today's hero is tomorrow's character” (p 42). In other words, very often the person we most admire represents that character we are in the process of developing in ourselves. Heroes, by definition, are persons worthy of emulation

This is why our heroes are our parents, our mentors, and, with any luck, our supervisors at work. Our heroes are the politicians we elect, as expect them to express and to embody those traits we find most admirable or important. In fairy tales, we often call that person most worthy of admiration and emulation “the king.”

II. Jesus

When Pilate encounters Jesus, Pilate goes right for the core of the matter, doesn't he? "Are you the King of the Jews?"

Jesus pushes back, inviting Pilate to consider what he means by this question.

But Pilate sticks to his script: he has a very specific concern as Rome's representative in Palestine. Does Jesus represent a threat to the Roman Empire?

So Jesus elaborates for him. If Jesus was a rival for the political power held by Rome, things would look very different at that moment: Jesus never would have been handed over into the power of Pilate. Jesus is, indeed, a king, with more resources at his disposal than Rome could ever dream of. And yet, Jesus is a different kind of King. Jesus says, "My kingdom is not from here."

III. Who is King?

Pilate is looking out for kings, political rivals to Rome. And he's right to recognize one in Jesus, though on a level he can't even imagine. Jesus is talking about being a spiritual king not in the sense of "unreal" or "imaginary," but in the sense of a kingdom that is *more* real and *more* pervasive than Rome could ever be. Of all the kings with whom Jesus is in competition, Caesar and the empire are the least of his concerns.

More challenging are those kings that we follow daily, to our own hurt. These are the kings that speak of death and darkness rather than light and life.

Some of us are weighed down by the dominance of empire and politics in our lives. Empire, the state, is a jealous god, arrogating to itself all the power of life and death in the world. Our government chooses which citizens should be killed in the name of criminal justice and which non-citizens should be killed in the name of defending liberty. Politicians make decisions that shape other areas of our lives and remove choices. The state holds up certain ideas around prosperity, equality, and justice that may or may not match those values we find proclaimed in Scripture. Is the state the most influential king in your life?

For many of us money and jobs, debt and consumption are the overriding narratives in our lives. How to get money and how to spend it. How to get more credit or how to claw our way up out of debt. How to get the next shiny iPhone or fancier car. Are money and jobs the kings of your life: do they claim most of your attention from day-to-day?

Sex and identity, pathology and loss are kings for many of us. Life is about guarding our vulnerabilities or cultivating those things which, even though they hurt, at least give us a direction and a story to tell.

Living with the self as king is a terribly common story. A life where all decisions are ultimately mine and subject to no other jurisdiction. An example of how many of us struggle with this is in our use of time. In our “Way of Love” class during formation hour, we spent a week talking about Sabbath, God’s example of resting one day per week and our reluctance to do so because it means giving up control and admitting that the world will continue without us. It means admitting that we are not the king. Making my own decisions, subject to no other authority, is a very modern, Western thing to do. But the “self,” floating free of any anchor, is a terrible and cruel king, subject to every wind and whimsy of influence.

IV. Invitation

On Christ the King Sunday, we finish up our liturgical year, making a final statement about who Jesus is in our lives. From the expectation of Advent, through Jesus’ birth, life, persecution and death, we build up to the climax of Easter, celebrated chiefly at the Easter Vigil when we proclaim once again Jesus’ resurrection. It is that resurrection that ultimately testifies to the trustworthiness of Jesus as a King to be emulated. Nothing, not even death, can overcome the power of Jesus to give us life.

Are you ready, like Jesus, to speak truth to the powers and principalities in your life? If television programs and movies fill your thoughts and emotions, are you ready to trade them in for time spent in the quiet discipline of prayer? If money and job and consumption are your primary concerns, are you ready to beat them back with a pledge card and store up treasure in heaven instead? If seeking those things that will make you feel good in body or mind is your primary function, are you ready to go serve others instead and spend yourself on behalf of the welfare of other people? If you are your own despotic little king, are you willing to sacrifice

your will and your way and your self-concern for the sake of others, building relationships and caring in mutuality before God?

In other words, who is the King of your life, and are you cultivating a life that enthrones Jesus above every other influence?

A Christian is one who seeks in every time and place to exalt Christ as King. The cycle of the liturgical year and the other practices of the Christian church all point that same goal. When we set our hearts and minds on Christ, when Jesus is the one we admire and look up to and spend our time thinking about, it is Christ whose power and vitality we will inevitably experience.

Jesus said, “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.”

Jesus lives in your life, in both the cultivated self and sometimes even more in the shadow. Whom are you emulating? Whom do you admire? That is who you are becoming.

Choose your heroes carefully. They are who you are becoming. There is a king whose kingdom will outlast every other. He died for you and yet his love remains unstoppable. Who is your king?

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