

## The Feast of Christ the King 26 November 2017

[Joshua 24:1-3a, 14-25; Psalm 78: 1-7; 1Thess 4: 9-18; Matthew 25: 1-13](#)  
Vanderbilt Lectionary

[Christ the King/Reign of Christ A November 26, 2017 Textweek](#)

Today we keep as the Feast of Christ the King, a commemoration which probably came about for the pragmatic reason that the faithful are not easily lured to Church in large numbers on weekdays, with the result that the Feast of Ascension Day, which falls on a Thursday, when this notion of Our Lord as King is most appropriately celebrated, is observed by only a few.

The idea of King and Kingdom is most clearly expressed in the Gospel of Matthew. It's in Matthew that Christ says to the disciples, 'to you is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven.' It's in Matthew that Christ sends the disciples out to preach with the instruction to say 'the kingdom of heaven is at hand.' It's in Matthew that we learn that the seed of the parable of the sower was nothing other than the 'word of the kingdom.'

And when Our Lord comes actually to describe the kingdom, what a feast of imagery.

The kingdom is the seed of no consequence that bursts forth as the great overshadowing tree. The kingdom is the inconspicuous leaven that inspires and enables. The Kingdom is the secret treasure hidden in the field which demanded everything from those who had the wit to see it.

The Kingdom is the priceless pearl which had been passed over by others in their ignorance or unwillingness. The Kingdom is the all-embracing net of the fishermen which gathers in fish of all kinds, edible and inedible. And when Christ was asked who shall be greatest in the Kingdom, he invokes no martyred saint, no patriarch or prophet, no archbishop or pope. Instead he sets a child in their midst, and speaks of the Father's concern.

This use of the word 'kingdom,' and the use of the word in the New Testament generally, tempts me to think that 'kingdom' must be a divine joke word.

But if Kingdom is a joke word, and if it is true that Christ used it as a joke word, then we have to say that Christ had a sense of humour, and straightaway we're on thin ice.

Because there are words to describe God which are approved words – such as merciful, just, almighty, infinite, ineffable and so forth.

But as soon as we say God is shrewd, cheerful, sporting, or even brave, we're heading for trouble - which is odd when we remember that the mediaeval schoolmen taught that God possessed all possible attributes – but that's how it is. To say Christ had a sense of humour doesn't seem quite right.

Yet there was humour around.

It was, after all, Pilate's little joke to call Jesus 'king,' which must go down in all literature as the first joke that bounced, a joke compounded by the soldiers who provided him with a joke crown and a joke sceptre.

'Are you a king?' asked Pilate. 'You say I am,' Jesus replied, and Pilate had to consent for him to be bound and nailed to a cross in order to get the answer.

And what sort of King is this, the bystanders would have asked, reading the inscription on the cross?

And what kind of King is this? we ask, who know that he said 'except you become as a little child, you cannot enter the Kingdom of heaven,' and 'it is not the will of the Father that any one of these little ones should perish.'

What sort of a kingdom is it where the principal citizens are children in need of a Father? And what sort of a king is it who continues to be hungry and thirsty, a stranger and naked, ill and in prison, because of his complete union with his brothers and sisters? Because that's the story behind Matthew's allegory of the sheep and the goats, which we have as our gospel for today (25:31-46). The point is that this is a King who is a suffering King. A king who suffers with us, and continues to suffer with us.

When we are alone, cut off, a stranger, isolated – when we are bereft, naked of power or hope or incentive to go on any more – when we are sick and wrestling

with a disease of debilitation and death - when we are at our wit's end - when we are trapped in the prison of our mind, and have become intuitively dead, deprived of the insight which would allow to see and feel the presence of God - then this God suffers with us.

And here is the final contradiction, for this king is a king who is in need because we are in need. When we are hungry, thirsty, a stranger, naked, sick, and in prison, so is this king. So here is a king who, because he is so 'with us,' also needs to receive help.

Surely then, in the light of all this, 'kingdom' must be a joke word, which Our Lord seized on with great audacity, and pushed through the structures - beyond the crowns and the palaces, to something left behind in the dawning light of human consciousness - to the life of love, of intimacy, of trust and relationship whose source and upholding power is God.

Through the fog of realms and ranks we catch a tantalizing glimpse of the dimensions of God, where the dynamic is forgiveness and reconciliation rather than deals and documents, and where trust is the expression of the love which transcends all law.

But where then can we find this Kingdom - this kingdom where nothing is what we would expect - where nothing conforms to our limited assumptions? We are given a clue. If the way 'king' and 'kingdom' are used by Christ is really as an irony, a joke, a teasing - words which defy our preconceptions - then the Kingdom will be where we least expect it to be. And that, says the Psalmist (139), will be wherever we go - to the uttermost parts of the sea, to Hell itself - that which is God is there.

This Kingdom of God, said our Lord, is where you least expect it, and where you least expect it is where you can't escape it, and where you can't escape it is within you. You can deny the Kingdom, but you can't escape it, because it is within you, for it is of the essence of the mystery of the Faith that we made righteous by the indwelling of Our Lord himself, whereby we become a new creation, at one with this gracious God, our source, our enabler, and our inspirer. Amen.

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