

OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST THE KING - A

Rev. Jamin Scott David

What do you think of when you hear the word “king?” Some people get the image of an old man, sitting on a throne, holding on his head a crown that he can barely keep from falling off. Others might think of a man dressed in all white, rhinestones from head to foot, with slick black hair and blue suede shoes. That’s right – the King – Elvis. Probably the most visible piece of royalty that we have this day is Queen Elizabeth of England, an older lady whose leadership role is in many ways more ceremonial than administrative.

The word suggests someone at the top: a figure exercising power and receiving adoration from everyone.

Jesus isn’t anything like those images that we think about when we hear the word “king.” We don’t really picture him with a crown that’s so heavy he can barely wear it. And we definitely don’t think of him decked out in blue suede shoes. How did this simple man, this carpenter from Nazareth, come to be regarded as a King?

The Scriptures today provide us with a strange image of kingship so that we might truly understand what Christ’s reign is all about and how you and I fit into that picture of kingship.

In the first reading from the book of the prophet Ezekiel, Christ our king is compared to a shepherd who is particularly attentive to those who have strayed and to those who are injured or sick. The image is a good one of a king who is a personal protector and provider, not just an impersonal authority. And sure, he does judge between one sheep and another, but he does it as a loving shepherd.

The second reading from Paul’s letter to the Corinthians gives us some further clues about kingship. Paul tells his community of the price that the shepherd was willing to pay for the peace that has been prepared for us. He preserves his sheep from the dangers around them by taking them on himself. And it was through his death and resurrection that he triumphed. He is a king and he rules as one. But his rule is not oppressive. Rather, in Christ we all receive new life.

In the Gospel, we learn that kingship is the responsibility of everyone. We see that familiar image of the Son of Man, the shepherd, who “separates the sheep from the goats,” and we are told the reason for the separation and the judgement. “Whatever you did for the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.” In other words, our king identifies himself with the needy, with those who are hungry, with the ill, with naked, with strangers, and even with prisoners. He rules over all who have been beaten down by life and those who have given up. And he tells us that when we find such people, we have to pick them up and give them hope. Otherwise, judgement will fall upon us!

Yes, this image of kingship that our readings establish for us are indeed strange notions: God blesses richly those who suffer adversity: those who die will ultimately rise again. True kingship is not about power and riches but humility and forgiveness.

This is tough for us, people who look up to old men with heavy crowns, or kings that sing about being cooped up in jail, or queens with little authority but her face pasted all over coins and postcards. Yet, the Gospel message to us is that we too have to reign from our own crosses rather than elaborate thrones. If we are to share in Christ's kingship, our rule has to be filled with charity until the true king comes again.

That's what we celebrate today as we conclude our liturgical year: Christ our King, no matter how strange his rule might be, rules with great majesty: by seeking the lost, by offering salvation to those who call out to him, and by elevating and making friends of his enemies. Our call is to do the same: to welcome those who haven't been to Church in years though we might be tempted to toss them out; to proclaim to these lost ones that God does love them no matter how pitiful their situation; to invite those that try to overthrow us equal share in the laud and majesty of that kingship we share.

What kind of king is Jesus for you and how do you share in his reign? As our liturgical year draws to a close, let us embrace this new image of kingship – one that destroys any other ones that we have and that leave us all shook up – mm, mm.