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Of Crowns and Kings

The consistent truth about life is that human nature remains the same from ancient times to modern times. Though we have gained volumes of knowledge and experience, we still relate in basic drives and motivations with those generations that have gone before us.

In the Book of Solomon in the Hebrew Scriptures we have the stories of the ordering of what was then the young nation of Israel. Moses died, Joshua led the people across the Jordan into the Promised Land and then the Israelites began to live out the realities of a growing nation. In that process, judges were put in place to structure both the civil and religious culture. Samuel, a wise and faithful judge, appoints his sons to follow him and it is then the people begin to complain. Samuel is told, "You are old..." Now, that is never a good way to start a conversation, "You are old" however, that is just what Samuel hears and then he is told "and your sons do not walk in your ways, now appoint a King."

Here is the problem. The Israelites already had a King. Yahweh is King of the Jews. God is the one and only King of the Israelites. However, there is a reality in human nature that we want a real live person to come in and save us. The Israelites envy their neighbors who have kings and they want one, too. They want one who will take the responsibility for them. One who will be wise, compassionate and strong. One who will watch over them so that they can sleep well at night. They want their very own king and they want Samuel to find them that king.

Samuel hears the concern of the people and goes to God in prayer. Yahweh reminds Samuel that God is King and that the Israelites do not need another king. Samuel tries to explain this truth to the people, but they continue to insist. So it is Samuel who anoints Saul, the first King of Israel and then the saga begins. Story after story is told about the kings of Israel. The struggle with power and authority becomes the plot line of the life of one king after another.

And the problems are not just with the Kings of Israel. King Henry the VIII was at odds with the Catholic Church and so he broke away from that tradition and declared himself the head of the Church of England. The break was not for religious reasons, but rather for political ones. He sought Papal dispensation to marry his first wife and then was seeking an annulment from the Church of Rome for that marriage so that he could marry Ann Boleyn. He is refused by the Catholic Church so he declares himself the

spiritual leader of the Church of England and it is from that tradition that the Methodists were formed. Not a very inspirational step in the Protestant Reformation.

In our own national history, we defeat King George III of England in the Revolutionary War and immediately call for the crowning of George Washington as King. Many Americans who had wanted to be free of England were now ready to crown their great leader George Washington as king. Fortunately, George Washington wanted no part of it, but it does not take much imagination to hear the people calling for it. "Washington will lead us. Washington will take care of us. Washington will be King so that we can all sleep well at night."

The Israelites already had a king. Yahweh was their King. Yahweh had already liberated them from bondage in Egypt, brought them to the Promised Land and established and blessed them as a nation.

We, too, have our King. Christ is our King. God came to walk among us in the person of Jesus. He has clearly offered us a path for living this life and has defeated death by giving us life beyond this life. In our daily living, we are guided by the presence of the Holy Spirit and the body of Christ called the church. We have all we need. We have more than we will ever need.

As our guest preacher, Dr. Fred Lewis shared at the Thanksgiving Eve Service that we are already living in our promised land. We are the envy of much of the world. However, our greatest blessing is not that we live in the land called "America"-- our ultimate blessing is that we are the people of the Resurrection.

Yet, we become very confused about where to place our loyalties. We have been known to allow our patriotism to become King. We allow our insatiable drive to acquire, our consumerism, to become King. We allow our need for immediate gratification to become King. We have declared money as King, addictions as King, the pursuit of success as King.

I share with you these verses of a poem by unknown origin.

They Missed Him

They were looking for a lion,
He came as a Lamb, and they missed Him.

They were looking for a warrior,
He came as a Peacemaker, and they missed Him.

They were looking for a king,
He came as a Servant, and they missed Him.

They were looking for liberation from Rome,
He submitted to the Roman cross, and they missed Him.

They were looking for a fit to their mold,
He was the mold maker, and they missed Him.

What are you looking for? Lion? Warrior? King? Liberator?
What are you looking for?

They were looking for their temporal needs to be met,
He came to meet their eternal need, and they missed Him.

He came as a Lamb to be sacrificed for your sin.
Will you miss Him?

He came to make peace between God and man.
Will you miss Him?

He came to model servant hood for all humankind.
Will you miss Him?

He came that we might have true liberty.
Will you miss Him?

He came to give you eternal life.

Aldous Huxley may have summed it up best when he said, "Most human beings have an absolute and infinite capacity for taking things for granted." We have become resigned, lack passion, move through life without much intention. We go with the flow of our culture and do not often pause to consider or question the direction our lives are taking. And in so doing we are missing the Divine in our midst.

We already have a King. We need not continue to seek another to reign over us. We need merely to become more deeply connected to the Divine love that surrounds us and to focus on the ways of the King of heaven and earth.

Jesus' ways are mysterious to us. He wears a crown of thorns rather than a crown gilded and bejeweled. He comes to serve rather than be served. He is the "come on in" King to use the language of author Brian McLaren. He is eager to expand his kingdom, but not by force; by love.

The passage in Philippians reminds us that Jesus came not to seek equality with God, but make himself a servant. He did not take on the arrogant nature of power, but

humbled himself and became obedient even to death. Jesus did not exalt himself, God exalted him; God lifted Jesus Christ as Lord and King. Living in this culture of power, greed and self-interest, we are confounded by the ways of our King.

We stand before our God confused, almost wishing that he would coerce. We find ourselves wishing that he would take on the attributes of leadership that we admire most in the powerful of this world. Yet, our King refuses to lead from the rule book of this world; he leads from a place of grace as no other before him or since. When we fully realize this truth, we bow in gratitude to our King and offer our lives in loyalty and service to him.

We find it difficult to put our trust in our King because we spend more time with CNN or Fox News, on the internet or working crossword puzzles each day than we do with scripture, prayer and service. A member mentioned to me that my saying this made them feel guilty about doing crossword puzzles. Not at all! It is how we prioritize our lives that is important. We have hoped that somehow entering into this holy space we will grow spiritually through osmosis. Our hope is that somehow holiness will seep into us and we need only show up for the process to take place. Of course our truth is that we are far more literate, far more informed on the ways of this world than the ways of our Savior and King.

William Willimon tells a story about the birthday party of a five year-old. The children on the guest list came dressed up as royalty. When the birthday boy blew out his candles, he wished that everyone could feel what it was like to be king or queen. Willimon's response is that in baptism we are made new by what happened at Calvary. "We, who were nobodies, became somebodies. Those who were no people became God's people. The wretched of the earth became royalty." (*Remember Who You Are*, pp. 30-31)

We are the people of the Resurrection, we are living in the Promised Land, we are God's people, we need no other king, we need no other royalty; we need only to live in the kingdom that God envisions, the place that Jesus has described to us in detail in scripture.

This seems the ideal time in the year to pause and consider where we have placed our loyalties. As we prepare to celebrate the birth of our King, we have the opportunity to look deep within and be honest about what we have elevated in our lives. What have we crowned in life? Part of the process is evaluating where we put our time and energy. Where we commit our energy and resources invariably becomes the focus of our living.

What takes your time and energy? What reigns supreme in your life? Honestly in this culture – it is money. We have elevated money to the level of God. Our worship of

money has grown all consuming - making money; spending money; having envy about someone else's money, it is all about money. For so many in this nation, money controls them rather than the other way around. There is never enough even when there is more than enough. It is the mentality of consumerism. We are loyal, true blue consumers, completely devoted to that king.

Our true King is Jesus Christ. He is not the king that was expected, but he is the only king that offers us life in abundance on earth and life eternal. He is the only king that cares about the ultimate well being of our soul. He is the only king that has come to serve rather than to be served. And when he greets us on the first day of our life beyond this life he will inquire as to who or what has been king in our life. The living of our days on this side of life will be our answer on that day.

I do love football and I especially love college football. However, I always feel a little uneasy this time of year, because it is now that colleges begin to announce coaches who have been fired. According to the schools employing them, these coaches have just not delivered.

Christ is our King. He has delivered on his promises to us. But have we taken his place in our lives seriously? He has delivered on every promise, but have we delivered on our love and devotion to him? Have we delivered on our discipleship?

The answer is in the here and now. The answer is in the living of these days. The answer is in structuring our lives so that Jesus is at our center. The answer is in shaping our days as disciples of Jesus Christ.

As we prepare for our Advent journey, imagine spending at least as much time in scripture, prayer and service as you do shopping for gifts, preparing Christmas cards and attending holiday festivities. Join the Advent Study that Rev. Walker is leading. Come and study scripture in the adult classes on Sunday mornings or join the Monday morning Bible Study class. Center your day in the spirit of God on Wednesday mornings in the Chapel from 7:30 to 7:45 am. Hear a fresh take on the Christmas story as our children present a pageant on Wednesday evening December 5, adopt a family, support the mission of the children at Meridian Street, visit a nursing home, find a way to serve during the season that is before us.

Traditionally, we end the old year and begin the new with resolutions. As we come to the close of this Christian year, may we resolve not to take our King for granted, but to grow ever more clear about his ways as we study, pray and serve in his name. The disciples of Christ live a life to be envied. It is the path of mystery, love and compassion. It is the way of Jesus Christ, King of all Kings, Lord of all Lords, Love of all Loves!