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Whole and Holy

I love the second part of the quote on the front page of the bulletin. “Can one king be dethroned and another crowned in thy soul and thou hear no scuffle?” These words come from the 1600s but they speak to me in 2006. Yes, I hear a scuffle in my soul on a regular basis. I would gladly declare that the one I want to be ruler over my life is Jesus. I yearn to become the person he envisions. I desire to spend more time in prayer and meditation, to have a deeper understanding of scripture, to be generous in spirit and compassionate in action. But honestly when it comes right down to living out my days, the one I want to crown in my life, the one I want to lead in my life is me! I yearn to be in full control of my environment and while we are at it, I am more than happy to be in control of your life too. All things would go my way. I would decide what is and is not appropriate behavior. I would decide who is in and who is out. I would be in charge. Ah, just imagine it. It is actually quite frightening even to me. I hear the scuffle in my soul on a regular basis. I profess Christ as King, yet I consistently attempt to dethrone him.

When I was a little girl there was a television show called, “Queen for a Day!” I loved that silly show. Four contestants were chosen from the studio audience. They came onto the stage one by one and told the host, Jack Bailey, about the trials and tribulations of their lives. Each one would have a tear-jerking story to share. The audience would then decide, using the applause-o-meter, who had the best story, or the most need, and the winner would be crowned Queen for a Day. She would be showered with gifts – often appliances- and in that moment of time, all her dreams would come true. I loved hearing those stories. I cried at the pain and suffering endured by these women and though I could not be heard, I would applaud and cheer for the woman I felt most deserving. And then, when the winner stepped forward, she was wrapped in what appeared to be a beautiful red velvet robe and a crown was placed on her head, I would feel like all was right in the world. It was perfection. Ah, to have a life so terrible that you would be the winner of Queen for a Day. Every young girl’s dream. Imagine being Queen for a Day and winning a washer and maybe even a dryer. What extravagance.

Ah, my point – to be queen, to be in charge – to have control – what a delicious concept. To borrow a line from Mel Brooks’ History of the World Part I –“it is good to be king” or queen as the case may be.

It is good to be king. Knowing that it is good to be king, we are constantly bombarded by dueling realities for our submission. And you and I both know that when we begin to bend on one knee to an addiction or self adulation, or anything that would become greater in our lives than our love for Christ, our soul is indeed in turmoil. Over time, we turn down the volume on the deepest desires and aspirations of our faith and turn up the volume on that which we would choose to enthrone instead.

Jesus stood before Pilate and said that yes he was King, but not of this world. Not of this world, indeed. We would not have him as king, or commander in chief or any other world leader. Jesus is far too religious for us. No, we want our religion securely packaged in an hour on Sunday morning so that it does not intensely influence our living day to day. And we certainly do not want a King that would question our motives and our actions either as individuals or as a nation.

Who sits on the throne of your soul? Who or what is the reigning force in your life? It is a question worth asking ourselves every morning and every evening.

In the book of Colossians, Paul is writing to a community that has blended the teachings of the culture with the teachings of Jesus. There is confusion within this young faith community. I only recently heard the words of the first chapter of Colossians in a new way. As a part of the Monday Morning Bible Study, we share the reading of the scripture. One of the participants of that study read from the version of the bible called the Message. I share with you the words she read a few weeks ago.

The teaching of our tradition is that Christ is supreme. Yet, we are not willing to kneel to any king or queen in this country. We made that abundantly clear on December 17, 1773 when Samuel Adams and 150 other men heaved tea off the ships into the Boston bay. Since that time, we settlers in the new world have belittled and derided the royalty in England. They are the stuff of gossip column headlines. With our resistance to the idea of royalty, it is little wonder that we struggle with the image of Christ as King of Kings. We prefer the Jesus who welcomes little children, heals the sick and feeds the hungry. It is this image of a kinder, gentler Jesus that appeals to us. But, in fact, the risen Christ is the King of Kings. The Christian faith traditions acknowledge this openly. Christ as King is embedded in our tradition. Is Christ as King embedded in our soul?

No robes or crowns for this king. No bejeweled scepter or throne. This king reigns in the Kingdom of God, a kingdom like no other. A place where the enemy is offered blessing, where the hungry are fed, where the naked are clothed, where the lost are embraced and where the poor are valued and appreciated. It is a kingdom of eternal hope and blessing.

The image on the cover of the November 13 issue of Newsweek Magazine is a cross wrapped in an American flag. It instantly caught my eye. The cover story is entitled, "The Politics of Jesus." The stories inside the magazine focused not on the politics of Jesus, however, but on the recent election and the evangelical influence in America. The image of the cross wrapped in the American Flag brings diverse reactions from the Christian community. Just as there is no one point of view in Islam or Judaism, the Christian community has a wide spectrum of interpretation and expectations. The Politics of Jesus was merely a headline. It is the agenda of various religious groupings that drove the content in the articles. It is the human agenda that has become our focus in this culture, in this Christian culture. We have become a people who often use our religion as a weapon as we attempt to enforce our personal agenda. It leads us to an understanding that Christ may be King, but we – whoever that Christian group may be – want to be in charge. Christ has been relegated as a figurehead rather than our supreme influential ruler. To make matters worse, our Christian human agendas have become so divisive that there are those in the world who have become fearful of the Christian faith tradition.

The politics of Jesus are never about excluding, demeaning or harming and yet the politics of many Christians have become all about exclusion.

In the Newsweek article, Sam Harris, an atheist and author of Letter to a Christian Nation and A Case Against Faith, wrote these words, "It is of course, taboo to criticize a person's religious beliefs. The problem, however, is that much of what people believe in the name of religion is intrinsically divisive, unreasonable and incompatible with genuine morality." For me, this is a painful, but truthful account of Christianity as it is portrayed in our culture.

Christ the King is far more interested in social justice than politics. When Jesus walked the earth, he was criticized for not interfering in the politics of his own time. True now as it was then, Jesus yearns

that all might know of his love so that we will live as a people who understand that we are already whole and holy. Not holier than thou, but holy, connected to the presence of the Divine within us and clear about the agenda of the Christ the King. Not the King or Queen of the Day, but the King of all times, places and people. The King of Love who reigns this day and always.

I used to attend meetings of the Board of Ordained Ministry in the California Pacific Conference in a convent. It was a beautiful spiritual retreat center, where the Board would meet for two or three days at a time. Within the center itself, there was a collection of crucifixes. I have never been a big fan of the crucifix, Jesus hanging on the cross, but many of these were so beautiful, and so vivid that I would stand before them in tears. In the protestant tradition, the cross stands empty because our focus is on the resurrection, rather than the crucifixion. Yet, it seems to me a far more powerful image for American Christians to consider is the cross draped by the body of Jesus rather than the stars and stripes. It is an image of love greater than any human brokenness. It is an image of grace deeper than any division.

We are the people of Christ first and foremost. Ours is a faith tradition based not of fear and isolation, but on inclusiveness and a radical expression of love. Though we may have relegated Christ as a figurehead king, the truth is no addiction; no amount of wealth, no power on earth is great enough to make us whole or holy. Only Christ can do that for us. We may spend a lifetime searching for that one thing on earth that completes us, but that one thing is the love of the resurrected Christ. For by his love, by his grace, we are already made whole and holy. All that is necessary is for us to embrace his reign and accept his gifts. In so doing, we not only find ourselves healed, but we also look at others with new eyes of compassion and grace.

The people in Colossae are not much different from us. They had blended the aspects of their culture into their faith and had strayed from the understanding of Christ at the center of their being. Their own personal agendas had crept into their practice of faith in such a way that their faith was being diluted.

Who or what reigns supreme in your life this day? In this season of shopping, is it consumerism, getting all that you possibly can in hopes of filling some void within. In this culture so focused on success is it money, making as much as you can in hopes of filling that hole that is within you? In this culture of pleasure, is it an addiction? A dance with alcohol or prescription drugs, sex, the internet, or even work that brings you a momentary high only later to leave you feeling more desolate than before. Who or what reigns supreme in your life? Have you given so much of yourself away to meet the needs of others that you have little or no time for your relationship with the Divine?

Only you can answer the question for yourself. For me, my faith journey is a constant struggle of will. I struggle with my own very strong will to be in control and in so doing often relegate Christ the King to the side line. He is always close, always in view, but not always on the field, not always at the center of my living. I have spent my life trying not to just be queen for the day, but queen of every day.

It is a simple phrase found in the 25th psalm. I found it in one of those times when I was very clear that even with all my efforts to control my environment; my life was falling apart all around me. I was desperate to have Christ take over again. I went to a small chapel on the campus of my seminary. I got down on my knees with a bible and just kept letting it fall open to the very word that would bring me comfort and hope. I spent a long afternoon doing the same thing over and over and over again. Closing the scripture and then letting it fall open again. I found many words, but none that brought me

the wisdom or comfort I sought. I missed a couple of classes, but I would not give up and then finally, I read this:

To Thee O Lord, I lift up my soul;
O my God in thee I trust.

Placing Christ at the center of life is a soul matter. It is a matter of trusting God's love to overwhelm our own agendas, fears and resistance. In so doing, I pray for you and for me that the day will come when we look in the mirror and fully understand that the gift is already given, the person who looks back at us is already whole and holy. Not because of any of our own doing, but because of a love that is greater than we can ever imagine. This is a day set aside to honor Christ the King. May this day be the first step in honoring Christ as King at the very core of our being.

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