

Conley Memorial Presbyterian Church, Christ the King Sunday, Nov. 22, 2015

What is a King?

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Psalm 132:1-18 Revelation 1:4B-8 John 18:33-37

Today is Christ the King Sunday, the final Sunday of the church year. Next week we enter the Advent Season, the joyous awaiting for the coming of Christ.

This week we look back on the Christian year and consider the Kingship of Christ.

But what is a king? What does it mean to be called a king?

I am called a king, at least if you think about my full name, Kenneth King Humphreys. Why did my parents give me the middle name of "King" when I was born? Their actual intent was to use "King" as my first name in the sense that, as the first child, I would be king of the household --- the one that deserved the attention of everyone. Can you imagine the ridicule I would have gone through as a child with a name like that? I guess naming a girl "Queen" would be OK, but "King" for a boy --- I doubt it.

Thankfully my parents' landlord bought a dog shortly before I was born. The dog was named King and my parents gave up on naming me King --- the name was relegated to my middle name. Can you imagine if they hadn't changed their mind and someone called out "King". Would I have responded or would the dog?

In any event, in my case the name is meaningless. It is nothing but an anecdote.

In a kingdom, at least in the past, the king was an absolute monarch and usually held a hereditary position passed on from father to eldest son through generation after generation. Today that is not always true and kings and queens, as is the case with the United Kingdom, are figureheads and government is representative instead of being headed by an absolute monarch.

In Biblical times, the first king of Israel, Saul, was named king by God. Saul was an absolute monarch, a rather unsavory one at that, so God chose a new king, David, a young shepherd boy. With David, God set up a hereditary kingdom, saying, *"If your sons keep my covenant and the statutes I teach them, then their sons will sit on your throne for ever and ever."*

David's descendants were to rule Israel in perpetuity. But the Psalm concludes, *"Here I will make a horn grow for David and set up a lamp for my anointed one. I will clothe his enemies with shame, but his head will be adorned with a radiant crown."*

What is the meaning of these words? According to Fred Craddock, et al¹, *"The horn was the symbol of strength and rulership. The lamp is a frequent figure used for the monarch, no doubt because of the significance of the lamp in providing light and thus a perspective from which to view life. Finally, the Davidic monarch is promised that his enemies will be humiliated, whereas his own stature and importance, represented by the crown, will only increase in luster."*

The promised anointed one to come from the House of David is of course the Messiah who would reign as the ideal king, but the Jews did not anticipate a King of the nature of Jesus. They expected an absolute monarch who would *"clothe his enemies with shame."* In the politics of the time a king's success was built on the humiliation of his opponents, and that is a far cry from the King they received, Jesus the Christ.

In our reading from John 18, Pilate asks Jesus, *"Are you the King of the Jews?"*

The answer he receives is not at all what he, or the Jews, expected. *"My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place."*

What other place? If Jesus was indeed the Messiah, shouldn't he be ruling over Israel and driving out the Romans? That is what the Jews expected of the descendent of David but that is not what they were getting, not at all.

Pilate responds to Jesus, *"You are a king then!"* and Jesus replies, *"You say that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me."*

Pilate replies, *"What is truth?"*

Presbyterian Outlook² said, *"Jesus was not saying that his kingdom is otherworldly, that it has nothing to do with this world. Rather he was explaining that the source of his authority on earth was not human, but divine. As proof he pointed to the fact that his followers were not fighting to set him free as they would if he were royal in the ordinary sense. Jesus' authority, indeed his messianic kingship was from God, not from human beings. He did not need human beings to crown him or to do battle for him."*

"Pilate understood that Jesus was claiming to be a king in some sense. Jesus

continued by revealing the unique purpose of his kingship: 'to testify to the truth.' He had divine, royal authority to bear witness to the truth of God ... Jesus was the truth of God in the flesh. So, in bearing witness to the truth, Jesus was pointing to himself and his unique role as Revealer and Savior."

Of course, Pilate did not understand this nor would the Jews. It was only after the crucifixion and resurrection that people began to understand.

John of Patmos in our reading from Revelation refers to, "...Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the first born from the dead, the ruler of the kings of the earth."

The ruler of the kings of the earth --- not a king, but the King of Kings.

*"Pilate can ask, 'So you are a king?' but he cannot understand the answer. But the church did, and does. The church stood and stands before powers and authorities, being interrogated. And in that hour the church recalls this scene. 'So you are a king?' Yes, but not because of the world's authorities or in spite of them. Because human hands did not place the crown on his head, human hands cannot remove it."*¹

What is a king? Who is the King of Kings? Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior.

Amen.

1. Fred B. Craddock, et al, Preaching Through the Christian Year, year B, Trinity Press International, Harrisburg, PA, 1993.
2. Mark D. Roberts in "Presbyterian Outlook", March 19, 2012.

Note: All scripture quotations are from the New International Version of the Bible, 2011