

Pastor Roy's Sermon from Nov. 25, 2012

Readings: Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14, Psalm 93, Revelation 1:4b-8, John 18:33-37

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and the Christ our King.

I found a story about a king told by Paul Coelho. There was once a king who was ill. He heard of a healer who was able to make people well and paid her a visit. She asked the king, "Admit your shortfalls and failures as a family man and the leader of this kingdom. Confession helps us to own up to our problems, and liberates us from guilt and shame." The king told her, "Make me well without all this talk." He liked to imagine his accomplishments and great power to influence and be admired by the people. He didn't like to face his weakness which made his leadership ineffective. "Bring me someone who heals without all these annoying questions." The healer went away and came back with another healer. She said, "I have found that many problems come not from germs and diseases, but from matters of the heart: but since you refuse to talk I have found another who often works with those who do not talk. My friend is a veterinarian."

There are many presidents, prime ministers, and rulers of nations today. What makes a good leader? Is it not someone with vision to know the path to justice and freedom, plus the ability to lead the people in that direction? And yet how many leaders have been weakened by their personal flaws and arrogance? Most would like to lead their people into wisdom, justice, and peace; but they become distracted by their own fears and anxieties—so their leadership is undermined by greed and they fail to execute true justice and freedom. Fortunately, most leaders have a mixture of motives and gifts. In an age of democracy, limits are placed on absolute power and we are aware of the shortfalls of our leaders and our political parties. Which seem to become more and more divided with time for the sake of the personal gain of the politicians, the commentators, and those on both sides of the isle who have blinding agendas.

Today we celebrate the leadership of our Lord Jesus Christ. We celebrate a King who, in the vision of John the elder, is the faithful witness of a timeless reign of love which sets us free to live truly.

In the Gospels, our King Jesus meets the administrator of his district—Pontius Pilate—who asks him a few questions. Jesus knows full well that the political and religious world of Palestine in the first century, will not allow him to speak freely of justice and the kingdom of God and stay alive. Jesus presents to Pilate a different kind of king and a much different reign than the Roman Empire. Jesus reigns in his kingdom with truth—a truth that challenges everyone. Here is a truth of wisdom, justice, and mercy. True peace which begins with God, within—a life giving justice from God which calls into question illusions which seem so true, so vital, filled with a kind of hope—but alas, as empty—in the end—as this temptation to worship all of the wrong things.

So how do we serve Jesus Christ our King? What is our foundation? ??? It begins with mercy. There can be nothing until there is mercy. Nothing. Our foundation is the lovingkindness of the Grace-filled God. Our response is gratitude. Those who receive a great gift respond with great thanksgiving. Is not all of life grace? To awaken. To breathe. To digest the food we eat. To survive colds and other illnesses. To observe and participate in the beauty of God's creation. To work. To have family. To have friends? To have a home out of the elements. To meet with people who care about us. To love and be loved? All these are gifts of mercy, grace, unconditional love—which is the starting point of the spiritual life of hope.

Christ our King is not about political power and getting our way, but about the life giving chance to serve and love. Freely we receive, freely we give.

As with the king who didn't want to talk about his problems, we face our own challenges, fears, and weaknesses by inward confession to ourselves and outward confession to others and God. If we are honest (2x), we can receive mercy and live in mercy and we—and our people--will be well. Truly well. Of course the challenges, fears, and weaknesses are always close by—and they like to drive us crazy, but the mercy of God is more so—if we but trust this King who offers a very different kingdom, who reigns in a very different way. The mercy of our Good Shepherd King leads us by his own life, death, and resurrection into humble service, by which we find--in mercy and action--new life.

All of the seasons of the Christian calendar repeat this truth because none of it comes naturally—not for any of us. Grace is lifelong challenge.

May the Spirit lead us to gladly serve in the name of the King who loves freely and sets us free. Amen.