

**ST. CHRISTOPHER'S CHURCH
COBLESKILL, NY**

November 22, 2009 – CHRIST THE KING SUNDAY (B)

The Rev. Nina George Hacker

Sermon: "*A King Worth Serving*"

Daniel 7:9-14	(A king will come, whose kingdom is eternal)
Psalms 93	(The Lord is King. His throne has been established forever.)
Revelation 1:1-8	(A vision of Christ's Second Coming, as King)
John 18:33-37	(Jesus testifies that He was born to be a king—but His kingdom is not of this world.)

In the United States of America, we just don't get the king thing. After all, we fought a revolution to get rid of the one we had. People in Saudi Arabia have a better idea than we do, of what a king means. In that nation, the king is the supreme power and authority who owns and controls everything. Every person is his subject, bound to reverence and obey his majesty.

Our highest office is that of President. So, if we contemporized today's scriptural theme, what would "Christ the President" conjure up? Not much! Most of us regard politicians as corrupt, immoral, and untrustworthy. And too many royalty elsewhere are little more than scandal-ridden media celebrities. Okay, so we Americans didn't want a king. But do we need one?

Today's Scripture readings indicate that we do need a king. But not a king such as they have in Saudi Arabia, or the British monarch our forbears overthrew. We need a king like Jesus, who plainly told Pilate that His kingdom was not like those of this world.

As a Roman citizen and the Governor of Judea, Pilate had a clear concept of the absolute rule and autocracy of the Emperor. Pilate's notion of a king and his kingdom would have been filled with images of pomp, grandeur, riches, and the brutality, torture, and fear of the sovereign's armies. He was incapable of comprehending that Jesus was a king the world had never before experienced.

Pilate is thinking in worldly, political terms, while Jesus is referring to a heavenly, spiritual kingdom. Because this would-be ruler doesn't fit the prevailing mould, Pilate keeps questioning Him. "Are you, or are you not a king?" He still doesn't get it that Jesus is talking about something entirely different.

Pilate wasn't the only one who misunderstood the nature of Jesus' kingship. Even Jesus' disciples failed to understand it. James and John wanted to sit beside Jesus in his kingdom. But to "sit beside" the king meant to share in his power. Jesus explained that they completely misunderstood the nature of his kingship and kingdom, for "Whoever would be great among you must be your servant."

I began by speaking of America's rejection of King George III of England. If you saw the film, "The Madness of King George," it highlighted something most of us never think about—that King George never got over losing the colonies. It has been said that for the rest of his life, he could not utter the word "independence" without choking on it.

In fact, when the fighting in America stopped, King George and his royal cronies across Europe were certain that George Washington would crown himself "Emperor of the New World." That's what they would have done. When King George was told, on the contrary, that Washington planned to surrender his military commission and return to farming at Mount Vernon, George III responded: "Well, if he does that, he will be the greatest man in the world."

With wise insight, he recognized that there is power in surrendering power, in emptying oneself of privilege and prerogative. Jesus knew that. Pilate did not.¹

The kingdom over which Jesus reigns continues to defy our understanding. It is one that turns the world's values upside down, because in Christ's kingdom, the one who serves is the One who rules. It is in Philippians 2 that we find the best description of Jesus' sovereignty: "Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God . . . emptied himself, taking the form of a slave . . . and being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross."

Jesus' power is not from this world—it is from God—nor is it meant to be exercised in the way that the world exercises power. Jesus wields His power through humility and self-sacrifice, by serving others, forgiving others, healing others, and giving to others. His power is not the power of weapons and rhetoric, but rather, the power of truth, and of faith, hope, and love.

While Christ's kingdom is spiritual, not political or economic, neither is it pie-in-the sky, by-and-by. It is real, and present with us here and now. As such, it also makes demands on us. As His subjects, King Jesus calls us to an ever-growing faith, to total obedience, and to unconditional love. But Christ does will never force or compel us to serve Him. With gentle mercy, He invites us to receive Him into our hearts, and to allow Him to rule our thoughts, words, and actions. And, unlike the leaders of this world, Our Lord shows that He is worthy to be our king, for whenever we turn to Christ we find help, healing, and peace.

When asked, "Where do we see the reign of Christ?" Martin Luther said that we see the reign of Christ when we see grace applied, forgiveness extended, and hope engendered. Isn't that the kind of kingdom to which you'd like to pledge allegiance?²

Today's lesson from Revelation reminds us that Jesus is God's faithful witness on earth, the only man who has ever risen from the dead, and as such, is greater than all the kings of the earth. Saint John proclaims, He is the one "who loves us and freed us from our sins by His blood." What earthly king ever did that?

The folk singer Bob Dylan wrote a song titled, "You Gotta Serve Somebody," and I think that's true. Whether or not we realize it, we all ascribe power to something in our lives that is bigger than we are. Whether or not we are willing to acknowledge it, each of us serves and bows down to something that's running our lives. And it might not be God. The king of our lives might be money, peer pressure, our career, an addiction, anxiety—or even ourselves. As long as you're serving something, why not serve Christ?

But perhaps you are having difficulty connecting—or re-connecting—with Jesus. The famous psychologist Carl Jung wrote: "Christians often ask why God does not speak to them, as they believed God did in former days. When I hear such questions," he writes, "it makes me think of the rabbi who was asked how could it be that God was often manifest to people in olden days whereas nowadays nobody ever sees God. The rabbi replied, 'Nowadays there is no longer anybody who can bow low enough.'"³

To what do you bow down? . . . To whom do you look up? The question of sovereignty that Pilate raised 2,000 years ago is just as critical today. Sovereignty is a matter of who is in charge when it's dark and the world is falling apart. It's a matter of: To whom can we turn when we are in need, or when others are in want? To whom should we go to seek justice for others or mercy for ourselves? Through His life, death, resurrection, and ascension, Jesus reveals that He is in the One. He rules, not as a leader of this world—not with lies and violence—but with truth, justice, and love.

Jesus, as the beginning and end of all things, has full and complete control over evil, darkness, and the unknown. It is He who alone is able to vanquish death, conquer sin, and bring comfort and healing to all who follow Him.⁴

I'd like to close with a prose poem by Andrew Daughters, who composes Lectionary-based verse:

“What kind of a Kingdom has Jesus? No castle nor palace has he. No congress nor parliament sitting, deciding what laws there will be. Perhaps he has need of but two laws: Love God and your neighbor as well. To obey them is all that is needed, as all of the saintly can tell.

He has neither army nor navy, no air force to guard the frontiers to keep out the strangers unwanted and maintain the enemy's fears. Immigration he seems to encourage, of some quite disreputable, like fishermen, publicans, sinners. To such he is hospitable.

It seems there's no revenue service or taxes we must calculate. He surely cannot run a kingdom on what we put into the plate! No 1040 form comes in April to fill out before the fifteenth, with penalties charged for nonpayment, beginning upon the sixteenth.

No currency's here with his picture, no coinage engraved with his name. And where are the posters and slogans proclaiming his power and fame? And I see no trappings of kingship, no robes made of velvet and fur, no crown made of gold set with diamonds, to befit our supreme arbiter.

Jesus said that his kingdom was really not what Pilate had thought it had been. It was not of this world. And its glory was not of the kind to be seen. For those of us here in his kingdom, there is one other thing we have known: of the kingdoms around in his lifetime, it's the only one left with a throne.”⁵

The Bible assures us that Christ's kingdom is forever. The forces of this world cannot corrupt it. Unlike an earthly king, Jesus can't be bought off, pushed out, or assassinated. He will cater to no special interests—or even promote His own. He will never exercise influence by coercion but only through grace. He's the kind of king I want to obey. And I pray that Jesus is the kind of king whom each of you will worship and serve, all the days of our lives—and be willing to tell others about.

To Jesus Christ be all glory, honor and praise, dominion, power, and might, forever and ever. Amen!

ENDNOTES

1 William R. Boyer, “A Confusion of the Heart,” *Sermons.com* <illustrations@CLERGY.NET> 15 November 2009.

2 J. Barry Vaughn, “November 22, 2009 – Christ the King (Last Sunday After Pentecost) Year B,” <http://www.episcopalchurch.org/sermons_that_work_116701_ENG_HTM.htm> 21 November 2009.

3 Attributed to Carl Jung, by Marnie Barrel, via <marnie@AK.PLANET.GEN.NZ> 22 November 2003. Used with permission.

4 Adapt. Richard J. Fairchild, “A Kingdom Not of This World,” (© 2000, 2003) <<http://www.spirit-net.ca/sermons/b-or34sm.php>>. 22 November 2003. Used with permission.

5 Andrew Daughters, *The Kingdom of Jesus*, (CSS Publishing). *Sermons.com* <illustrations@CLERGY.NET> 15 November 2009. Used with permission.