

<read text: Revelation 1:4b-8>

I think we often have a difficult time with this image. Or maybe just with this part of our church year in general. With the concept of Christ as our King. Sure we maybe get that he works for our good. We like that he fought our battles and he leads us for our benefit. But that he has the authority to just tell us what to do in our lives? We hesitate a little at that one. Or that what we do should bring him alone glory and honor and not ourselves? Again, we get a little stuck on that.

But Jesus is king. He is king over everyone on this planet and in fact over everything on this planet. He has supreme authority as king. His word is law. He decides what happens to you, and while he does choose to listen to what we have to say, we also have no right to demand that we get a say in the matter. He is in charge of maintaining law and order and dispensing justice. He is king. He has always been our king, and he will be our king in a manner that we have never seen before in days to come. Now, if this much power and authority over us were given to any other person on earth, that might make us nervous, uncomfortable, or even afraid. But this isn't some sinful man who has this power over us. This is Jesus, this is God himself. And that means it's a very good thing, a true blessing to us to have and remember Jesus as our king for all time.

As I said, Jesus has always been our king. And he has, as our king, been responsible for maintaining order and justice in his kingdom. He has the laws posted for us, and the penalty for disrupting the peace of the kingdom is severe; it is death. And we have earned this penalty, no doubt. Where the law says to love each other, we have thought only of ourselves. Where the law says to give the king all the honor and glory and love, to trust his word above all else, we have instead acted as though we were in charge of our own lives. We ignore the word of our king and carry on how we see fit. Our arrogance in the face of our ruler has earned us death.

Or to illustrate the metaphor a different way, we as his citizens went out and provoked the kingdom's most ancient enemy, death. It's our fault it was coming and it was coming for all of us. It wasn't going to hurt the king, he was in no danger at all. But it is the responsibility of a king to protect his subjects, and so even though he had no hand in starting this conflict, even though he himself was in no danger, he fought the battle. He set aside his kingly garb and took up the body and life of a man. And in that armor he rode out to meet the enemy head on, alone. His army was the power of his love for us as he threw himself in death's path and stopped it from reaching the city.

In the fierce battle that followed the enemy claimed the life of our king, but the people behind the walls were spared. Our sins provoked the enemy of death, but by the shedding of his blood, we are freed from our sins (v5), and death no longer pursues us. We are safe behind the walls. We do know there are those outside the walls of his kingdom, those who do not trust in the king to protect them. They are still in danger. And as always, it's possible for us to wander outside those walls and return to danger as well. But while we stay inside we are safe. We are protected from the enemy forever because of the blood of our king shed for us, because he loved us.

These are the acts that founded the kingdom we belong to. This is what our king has already done for us. But again, Jesus' kingship is not just at one point in history, it is for all time. Even now he remains our king. And he is, right now, everything this section of Revelation describes him as. He is the firstborn from the dead (v5). Our king died on the battlefield to overcome death, but he was raised to life. He is the first to rise from earthly death to a life that will not end, but he has done that as a promise to us. Because he lives we know that we shall live as well. Behind the walls of his kingdom we are safe from eternal death, but an earthly death may still claim us before the end of the age. The promise in his resurrection is that the earthly death will not be permanent. We will rise from the grave just as he did and death in any form will never come for us again.

It is to these truths that he is the faithful witness as John calls him here (v5). And this is vital, because the truth of what has happened is what makes us citizens of his kingdom. As the word of God incarnate, he fulfills this role primarily through the Word. In scripture we are taught about who we are and what our king has accomplished for us. To those outside the walls he calls out, "I have defeated death! Come inside and be safe! Death cannot enter these walls!" And he sends out his messengers, his servants to gather up those who have not heard the message. They seek to lead all back to the safety of the walls of his kingdom. Some resist, some ignore, but the work continues. Only those who are made citizens of the kingdom by faith are safe, and there is no shortage of those who are still in danger.

Of course, as our king stands before us as a witness to his own death and his own resurrection, as he makes the promise of our eternal life certain to us, he does not neglect his regular kingly duties. He is the ruler of the kings of the

earth (v5). He remains in complete control, having complete authority over this world. He uses that authority over nations, over rulers and over individuals exactly how he sees fit. His authority is supreme. He has the power, he has the right and he has the wisdom to use it. It is not to be questioned. It is not to be defied. He can use it to chastise a nation that has abandoned him by giving them over to their sinful wishes. He can use it to chastise an individual who needs reminding that he is the only power that matters. He can use it to allow hardship to come to the most faithful to keep them from straying from his presence. He can use it to do whatever is necessary to bring as many to the kingdom before it is too late, and to keep those inside from wandering out.

But of course, it's not all discipline that he causes. We just tend to notice that more because it's unpleasant. He does use his power and authority to bless us. And if we stop to take a count, the blessings always outweigh the troubles. Even if all you can think to put in your "blessing" column is that you are protected from eternal death by his sacrifice, that alone tips the scales away from whatever earthly troubles are hounding us. And if that's all you can think to put in your blessing column, then maybe you need to stop and take a better look at your life. And really, even the troubles we suffer are blessings in their own way, because they are what the king allows to draw us and keep us ever closer to him so that we never suffer that eternal death. Better the temporary troubles now than eternal torment after.

But as we talked about last week, this arrangement is not all there is. It is only temporary. Our king does what he must now but it is all aiming toward an endgame that he has had in mind from the beginning. That day will be a day of great joy for many and a day of impossible terror for many more. The day will come just as described here (v7). He will come with the clouds and we will all see him as the king he truly is. Many will be terrified by that sight, because they will know how they have ignored this one who has ruled over their lives. They will recognize how they themselves pierced him with their lives of sin and selfishness. And even before that final judgment is pronounced they will understand what is coming for their actions.

Even we who know our King and trust him now will be enlightened. Seeing him fully revealed will be just as eye-opening for us who want to treat Jesus like a buddy who does nice things for us now instead of a King that we owe all honor and service to. Our sin is no different from the rest, but the difference will be how the King treats us. By faith in him, we are counted as faithful servants, who have done what was asked. Not because we have, but because the King did it for us and we are found to be within the walls of his kingdom.

Until the day Christ returns, our King treats us all the same in his grace. He shows his love to us in our lives, he feeds and clothes us all the same, he shines his grace on the good and evil alike, wanting all to come to him and be saved. That will all change when he returns from the clouds. And how we see him then will depend on how we see him now. By faith, we who trust in him to save us see him as King, and we trust that our King will protect us, and has saved us.

When he returns, all will be brought to him for judgment, even those who sleep in the earth. As we saw a few weeks ago, this is not something we need fear. The work of our King means we know for a fact now we will be pronounced "not guilty". All who belong to him, to his kingdom will be separated from the unbelievers, from those who chose the world over him.

As we are gathered up with him, the things we've been describing about us and our king in this sort of spiritual metaphor here are going to become physical reality. He will be our king in personal presence and we will be part of his physical kingdom in heaven. He will be the true good king, and we will be his people. Sin will not ruin the relationship any longer. No longer will we need to be disciplined against our sin, no longer will there be sin for him to protect us against. We will be with him as his people for eternity there.

We don't often think of Christ as our King as fully as we ought. But as Christians who belong to him, he is and has always been and will be in a way we can't fully imagine. It's difficult for us to think of having one person with complete and total authority over us. But as we look at who our king is, as we look at what he's done for us and is doing for us, and look ahead to what will happen to us because of him, it's not a bad thing to have a king such as him. On this Christ the King day, let us remember and celebrate our king. Our King who fought and died for us, our King who rules over us, and our King who is coming with the clouds to take us home forever. Amen.