

## **King Jesus**

Psalm 100  
Ephesians 1:15-23

Louis XIV, the “Sun King”, ruled over France for 72 years, the longest reign in history for any European monarch. (Queen Elizabeth II is sneaking up on him; she has been Great Britain's sovereign for 68 years.) Louis XIV enjoyed great success militarily and vastly increased his family's wealth and power. In 1685, however, he issued the Edict of Fontainebleau, which stripped French Protestants of their rights. A million souls lost their freedom to worship God as they saw fit. They had to report to local priests for re-baptism in Roman Catholic Churches. They had to pay the “Double Tax”, which was whatever the district superintendent decreed. (Hint: it always included a payment to that superintendent.) Protestants were officially forbidden from leaving France. King Louis XIV said he intended to create in them a “classe d'esclaves nouveau”, a new class of slaves.

After a few years under the Edict of Fontainebleau, the French Protestants started just walking away. In small family groups, by the hundreds of thousands, under the cover of darkness, they left their homes, their furniture, their animals, and walked with just the clothes on their backs to Switzerland or Holland, Protestant nations they could reach on foot. The governments of these nations permitted them to enter but pushed them to leave again as quickly as possible. And so, for the second time, regimes deprived themselves of the benefits these French Protestants could

have given them. They were the most highly educated, skilled, productive group in all of Europe, and nobody wanted them. So most of them came to America.

They settled in what would become the Maritime Provinces of Canada and the states of Maine, New Hampshire, Pennsylvania, New York, New Jersey and Louisiana. They brought with them a suspicion of all monarchs. Their descendants would help write that suspicion into the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. Fear of, and even hatred for, kings truly is a part of our national DNA.

Today is Christ the King Sunday, the last sabbath of the year—the *church* year. Next Sunday begins Advent, which Christianity considers the spiritual New Year. Pope Pius XI decreed the Feast of Christ the King in 1925, making it the youngest of all holy days in the Roman Catholic calendar. It was not moved to the last Sunday of the church year until 1970. Few Protestant churches observed it until recently. No Presbyterian Church in my experience ever did until maybe the turn of the century. So why, with the historical friction between Catholics and Protestants and our national antipathy toward kings, do we celebrate Christ the King Sunday? Because he is. He is the Christ (which is a title, not a given name). He is King. Worship him.

Near the start of our passage from Ephesians, the Apostle Paul writes a kind of prayer. He asks God to open our hearts and minds, so we might come to appreciate who Jesus really is. Then he riffs on the greatness of the Christ. He writes of the “immeasurable greatness of his power.” The word used for this appears nowhere else

in the New Testament, and indeed is rare in all written and spoken Greek. Translated literally it means, “the even greater than great expanse of power”. It functions like any English word with “super” added in front of it. Superman, Super Power, Super Ball: you get the idea. In the words of scholar Skevington Wood, next “Paul proceeds to collect all the synonyms he can lay hands on as he describes how the power of God functions...” We worship the greatest king in history, who transcends history.

But Paul is no school boy throwing in the thesaurus in order to get his essay up to the prescribed number of pages. Each word he adds refers to a different facet of power. He refers to potential energy, power to break free from resistance or control, bodily strength, the force of sea waves and more. Taken together, they are Paul's attempt somehow to get his readers to understand the boundless, eternal power of Jesus. God has the power even to raise himself from the dead. All things are under his feet. This imagery, common to the ancient world, depicts a king sitting on his throne with all the world his footstool. It appears repeatedly in the Psalms.

Moreover, God has made Jesus “head over all things ***for the church***”. The syntax here makes it clear Paul means that Jesus exercises his immense power for the benefit of the church. We are his body, his operational center as he continues to work his loving will in time and space. But we are also his beneficiaries. He works for our good. Yes, we must then go and work for his good in the world. But we have seen and received his power that we might ***use*** it. On Christ the King Sunday, when we remind ourselves to worship the King, we must also remind ourselves of the

tremendous blessing, and the equally tremendous responsibility, we have received as heirs of Christ.

Monarchical societies have highly-developed hierarchies. In the church, Christ is king. But while we must worship and obey him, we—as Paul elsewhere says—are little less than angels. In fact, and this is an important New Testament teaching, we **embody** Christ. We **incarnate** him. We put flesh and blood and tears into the work he seeks to accomplish. Can God work without us? Does God work without us? Certainly. Yet God also chooses to take subjects like us, mere peons, and elevate us to the status of fellow workers in bringing the Kingdom to its fullness.

Do not miss the specific content of the prayer Paul makes early in our Ephesians passage. He asks God that Christ's subjects might be given wisdom, knowledge of God, enlightenment and hope. Properly seen, these are all tools. God gives them to those who follow Christ **that they might work** to make known “the fullness of him who fills all in all.” As Christian speaker Tony Campolo put it, “(God) calls us not to like Jesus but to **do** Jesus.” What might doing Jesus look like for you?

In 2005 a Montreat College student named Adam Ripley, a Presbyterian, started an effort he called “Least of These”. He envisioned using donations to support three suppers per week for all comers—no questions asked—in a weather-worn Asheville, North Carolina neighborhood. Over the years his group found the funding and volunteer commitment to make that five weeknight suppers, plus a Saturday breakfast.

In 2011 long-time volunteer Liz Loop became the director after Ripley moved away. Nineteen years later Least of These averages 125 people served free of charge per meal. Sometimes three people show up to cook and serve, sometimes 20 do. Sometimes Least of These has more than enough raw ingredients, sometimes not so much. But, "It's what the Lord asks of me," Ms. Loop told a reporter for the Asheville Mountain Express. "I love these people. It can definitely be exhausting at times, but Jesus keeps me going." We might add that Loop and her helpers keep bringing Jesus to those they serve with love in the form of hot pancakes and sloppy joes. As an aside, "Least of These" comes from Matthew 25. Stay tuned for more on that.

This is a big example of a larger program that requires significant time and energy from people who feel a compelling calling to do the work. If you lack that kind of time and energy, you could volunteer to play a small role with Manna from 7, a comparable ministry happening at St. Stephen's here in Terre Haute. Or—especially in the Time of Covid—if you judge it best not to put yourself out there just now, you could give money to the effort. Some of you already do. Or you could identify people who fit the "Least" description and help them. As many of you know, I have a person in my life who definitely qualifies as one of the least. I will admit I struggle to know exactly how God wants me to serve this person. I have done so, often only to find my help just enabled harmful behaviors. But I cannot simply walk away. Not if I intend to keep climbing into this pulpit and proclaiming messages like this.

We embody Jesus Christ in this world. We make the kingdom visible to people

who may not have seen it before. This is a large calling. We start by working on our own walk with him. We must have spiritual resources from which to replenish ourselves when we **do** Jesus. Keep praying, for yourself, daily. This is neither selfish nor hypocritical. It is, rather, necessary. And pray for one another. Other ways to recharge our spiritual batteries include fellowshiping with our brothers and sisters in the church, especially these days; and worshipping Jesus Christ with the body of Christ.

The year of Our Lord 2020 seems to be the gift that keeps on taking. All the demonstrations and riots, the presidential election that just won't quit, and the virus. Yet when we accept the lordship of Christ we confess our faith in his purposes. **Something** is meant to come out of even a year such as this. So a final word on what it really means to obey King Jesus: it means to trust in his loving-kindness, his righteousness, his goodness. It means to believe that something good will come out of this year. In fact, many good things already have. Teenagers are still learning how to drive and studying math and falling in love (or so they think). Babies are still getting born. People are stepping into the pain and fear of others. Medical and first-responder personnel keep showing us what real heroes look like. Hundreds of people get fed in Asheville and Terre Haute. Millions of small acts of kindness happen day by day. The kingdom has already appeared in part; now we must help Jesus make his reign complete.

Church: embody Jesus. Obey him. Trust that in his sovereign purpose he **will** advance the coming of his kingdom. Worship Him.