

“The King Shall Come”
Christ the King Sunday
John 18:33-37

Pastor Bruce K Modahl
Grace Lutheran Church
November 22, 2009

In Jesus' Name.

Matthew, Mark, Luke and John all lived in and served particular congregations. Those particulars affected how each of them told the Gospel story, what details each of them emphasized. The preacher last week, Pastor Bixby, told us that Mark's congregation was composed mostly of people for whom the world did not work. John was the last to write his Gospel. By the time he wrote, the world had pushed his Christian community all the way to the edge. For John and his community “the world” was code for the realm of disbelief. The world refused to listen to the truth. According to John, Jesus not only speaks the truth, he is the truth. The world is the realm that refuses him. Yet God so loved “the world” that God gave the only-begotten Son. John presents us with these two colliding realms – the world and those who abide in Jesus.

Christ the King Sunday marks the end of the year for Jesus' abiders. This is part of the reality that is an alternative to the one we are schooled to think of as “the real world.” Look at what these two use to represent the end of the year. The world puts what at the end of the year? Come December 31 we see Father Time creep across the stage and exit. He has a scythe, a sickle over his shoulder. What has he harvested? I suppose the days and events of the past year. They are over and done with. And those who died in the year past, they too were cut down by Father Time. The next day, January 1, is pictured as a freshly diapered baby. This secular mythology is telling us, what? Life goes on. Death is followed by birth. In the new year we get another chance at making good. But do we? Is there a difference between Father Time and the Grim Reaper? Is there a difference between these two and the ghost of Christmas Future in Charles Dickens' *A*

Christmas Carol. They look alike to me. Their task is to show us our names engraved on a tombstone. That is finally all the world has to offer.

In the alternate reality, in the realm of Jesus' abiders, Christ the King, not Father Time, occupies center stage at the end of the year and at the end of all the years. We hear from Daniel, "As I watched, thrones were set in place, and an Ancient One took his throne...." In contrast to this one Daniel tells us about kings who throw people into fiery furnaces and in a lion's den and who cannot read the writing on the wall.

In the days before Israel had a king Samuel warned us, "These will be the ways of the king who will reign over you: he will take your sons and appoint them to his chariots and to be his horsemen, and to run before his chariots... and to make his implements of war and the equipment of his chariots. He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive orchards and give them to his courtiers. He will take one-tenth of your grain and of your vineyards... and of your flocks and you shall be his slaves." So it is with those who set up their thrones over us.

By September of 480 BC, Xerxes king of the Persians, had sacked Athens and defeated the Greek armies at every turn. He ordered his throne set up on a promontory overlooking the straits of Salamis to watch his fleet destroy the Greek navy. He outnumbered them 800 to 300 according to the historian Herodotus. His ships were larger and more powerful than theirs. He had a perfect view and watched his navy destroyed. According to the historian 300 Persian ships and were sunk and thousands perished.

On August 10, 1628 the Swedish king, Gustavus Adolphus, had his throne set up on a hillside so he could watch the maiden voyage of the *Wasa*. No one had built a warship as large and powerful. He had his throne set up so he could watch it on its way to join his Baltic fleet,

engaged in the Thirty Years War. As the ship left its birth, the captain ordered all the sails deployed. The ship came into the view of the king and his court. A gust of wind filled the sails. The boat heeled over and it sank. Only a few managed to swim free of its downward pull. Such are the kings who set up their thrones over us.

David Yeago teaches theology at Lutheran Southern Theological Seminary. He is fond of saying, “If Jesus is not your king, someone or something else is.” Did you see the news reports of the auction held of some of Bernie Madoff’s stuff? I was struck by how many of the same thing he had. He could never be satisfied with one or even with twelve of something. There was always more to have. The Tribune last Sunday ran an article about Nicolas Cage. He had to sell his Bavarian Castle because he owes the IRS 6 million. Don’t fret. He has another castle in Somerset, England, a mansion in Rhode Island, a home in Las Vegas, a Gothic mansion in New Orleans, and a house in Hollywood once owned by Dean Martin. He owns a dinosaur skull, a Lamborghini that once belonged to the Shah of Iran, two islands in the Bahamas, shrunken heads, jets, yachts, dozens of vintage cars, motorcycles, Action Comics No. 1 Superman edition, meteorites and two king cobras with vials of antidote, in case of attack.¹ Sometimes I think the difference between these two guys and us is less about the desire than it is quantity. We can’t have as much as they, but acquiring stuff is where we’ve laid our wallets. Our hearts follow. Jesus said where your treasure is there will your hearts be also. And stuff is a tawdry king.

The world also shows us more than tawdry. Sometimes it is pure evil. In 1933 Adolf Hitler became chancellor of Germany and declared his to be the one thousand year Reich, the one thousand year kingdom. Twelve years later Hitler died by his own hand in a bunker, buried in the rubble of what was Berlin. This was after putting the world to the torch and causing the

¹ Christopher Borrelli, “Things Nicolas Cage Doesn’t Own,” *Chicago Tribune*, Sunday, November 15, 2009.

deaths of an estimated 60 million people from 57 countries.² God's people and God's rule are pushed to the edge by a world that does not work.

“As I watched,” Daniel tells us, “thrones were set in place, and an Ancient One took his throne. . . . A thousand thousands served, him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood attending him. The court sat in judgment.” Whatever it is, whoever it is we have as king of our lives sits in judgment over us.

The judge's sweep is cosmic and personal. I am acquainted with the ruler who sets up his throne in my conscience and sits down to judge. The verdict is guilty over and over. No detail is too small to be dredged from the memory mire. This judge is not God but Satan, the tyrant who accuses God's people day and night. He has been cast down from God's presence. God will not listen to his accusations about us. But he sets up his throne in the world overlooking our lives. He is a usurper. His rule is illegitimate. What will dislodge this tyrant? The true king will.

A throne-room drama unfolds in John chapter 18. Pilate eventually took his seat on the throne in the place called the Stone Pavement. There in Jerusalem was an outcropping of Rome's authority. It was an extension of the emperor's own throne. From that seat he pronounced the guilty verdict and handed Jesus over to be crucified. His captors threw a royal purple robe over him and placed a reed scepter in his right hand. They crowned his head with thorns. They hailed him as king. A royal procession formed, except rather than being carried on his throne, he carried it. He bore his cross. The acclaim he heard from the crowd was not, “Long live the king,” but, “Crucify him; crucify him.” His throne was set up also on a hillside. The difference is this hillside is where the city's garbage and dead animals and executed criminals were dumped. Most people would not recognize a king in such a place, just as they would not recognize one born in a

² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_II_casualties

stable. So a sign was nailed above his head, reading in three languages, The King of the Jews. From the vantage point of that hillside Jesus saw the city below and all time past and future stretched out before him. He saw the whole darkness loving world. He could see all the way into the haunted corners of our lives. From this throne God announces the verdict: forgiven and redeemed. From this throne Jesus, with outstretched arms, would draw all of us to abide in him.