

“How Do You Like Your King?”

Mark 11:1-11

December 3, 2017

1st Sunday of Advent

You are in a popular restaurant to have breakfast. The waitress draws near. When you order your standard bacon and eggs, you know the question is coming. She arrives and asks, “How do you like your eggs?” There are so many answers to that question and each answer can be good, depending upon your mood that morning. Do you like them scrambled? Over easy? Sunny side up? Fried? Poached? Hard-boiled? Soft-boiled? I’m sure there’s even more, but you have to make a decision.

The Advent banner hanging above the altar proclaims, “The King of Kings is Drawing Near.” Like the preparation of eggs, there are so many ways to have a king. So, the banner begs the question: how do you like your king? In other words, what is the ideal king for you? And is the king proclaimed by the banner going to fit the bill as your ideal king?

Some people enjoy royalty like they have in Great Britain – something with a bit of fantasy to it. This was demonstrated again this past week when everyone was excited about Prince Harry becoming engaged to Megan Markle. It seems to be a blend of Camelot and a Walt Disney movie. People find such things to be quite romantic and emotional.

Some people would like a king who is less show and more substance – a king who comes with power and might to protect the nation, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, to enforce strict law and order. Such a king disciplines unruly subjects and executes enemies of the king. This idea of a strong, yet fair king may be a bit naïve, but one which seemed to be on the minds of the people in our text today. Perhaps they had forgotten their first encounter in desiring a king back in the Old Testament when they demanded of Samuel to have a king like the other nations. Despite the fact that the Lord warned them that a king would take their money and crops; tax them highly; confiscate their daughters to serve in his palace; and kill their sons on the field of battle; they wanted a king anyway so they could be like the other nations which had Kings. They learned their lesson soon after.

Some are a sucker for an underdog and would like a king who comes from poverty and, as a youth, becomes king. This is the King Arthur mode of becoming king. As the Disney mythology has it, Arthur becomes king at age 12 after pulling a sword, named Excalibur, from the stone. We find a king like this to be cute and sweet.

Still others would like a humble king who comes to serve his people, forgives his enemies, and dies in rescuing all who hate him. They desire a king who gives, rather than takes, and works for the good of his subjects. Okay, so maybe people don’t dream of such a king any more than a dream of such a president or member of Congress. Why? Because such kings simply don’t exist – or do they?

Jesus came as the Messiah, a type of King. We remember, especially at this time of year, how this King came into the world. He came from a humble family with two peasants as his parents. He was born in a humble location – the cold stable, a rough manger, and prickly straw. He grows up in humble situations, first as a carpenter, and then as an itinerant rabbi. The story of Christmas and what follows it is

obviously quite popular because it contains a baby (which we think is cute); tells the story of an underdog (which we love); and has memorable characters such as shepherds, angels, and visitors from the East which all lend to the warm and fuzzy nature of such a story.

The desire for a king prevalent in in our Gospel reading for today. The idea of a powerful king is still in the minds of the Jewish people who have obviously forgotten the lesson their ancestors learned about a king. We see this in the crowd that was forming; the parade that began; and the shouts of salvation, praise, and a reference to “the coming kingdom of our father David,” that were cried out. This was a declaration of the political nature of the event and the royal nature of the One who was being honored in this parade. Everything is going well. The King was coming and everyone was ready for a change.

In the short space of a week, this vision of the king morphs into something unexpected and certainly not understood by this crowd (any more than we understand why we are reading a Palm Sunday narrative in the first week of December). The king, who would save them and save the world, is rejected by the political and religious leadership of the nation. He is arrested by them, tortured by them, and then brutally killed on a cross. Why? What went wrong?

The answer is simple. Nothing went wrong. This is a different kind of King. His identity was different than any other king who would ever lead Israel or any other nation. It’s not just that he was not physically strong or economically wealthy. It’s not even just that he was a descendent of King David, the most powerful king Israel it ever known. It was that he was the Son of God. Prophets had foretold his coming. Angels had declared his birth that first Christmas night. He had taught things only God knew and had performed miracles only God could do.

Yet he came with humility and not arrogance. His choice for mode of transportation on that day makes it very clear. He rode a humble donkey and not a magnificent and powerful horse. He came, not to be served, but to serve others. Talk about being a different kind of king! His goal was very different too. He did not come to achieve a military victory, to set up a political entity, or to solve all economic problems within the nation. He came with eternal answers to eternal problems, rather than temporary answers to temporal problems. He came to forgive sin; to restore people to God; and to, once and for all, do away with all problems.

More surprising even than his identity was his methodology for accomplishing all of this. This King did not use military force or wealth (two of the most popular weapons of kings) to accomplish these grand and lofty goals. Instead, He sacrificed Himself – not his comfort, wealth, or prestige – but His actual body and life which he offered on the cross as a payment for the sin of all humanity, including you and me. His death on the cross forgives all of your sins and brings you into a new and right relationship with God the Father. And the devil who depended upon your guilt and your fear of death achieve victory, Jesus defeated on the cross on your behalf by pardoning your guilt and defeating death for you. He has overcome death itself by His death on the cross so that you might live a new life here on earth now and in eternal life in heaven in the future. His resurrection was proof of that. Now, THAT is an awesome king.

This King, who came so long ago and did so much for you and me, still comes to us today in order to do more for us now. His identity remains the same. He still comes as the Son of God and Savior of the world. His attitude remains the same, humble and serving us. However, instead of coming on a humble donkey, He comes in humble elements of bread and wine. The goal remains the same – to bring us life and salvation. However, this time there is a slight variation in His methodology. Instead of coming to earn forgiveness and life for us on the cross and in the tomb, Jesus comes to give us that forgiveness and life which His body and His blood earned on the cross by delivering into our mouths that same body and that same blood hidden in bread and wine. Like the people in our lesson, we shout, “Hosanna! Save us!” in the Divine Service here in church. However, we know who this King is; from what He is saving us; and how He saves us. Therefore, we receive the King and His gifts with faith.

Although Jesus’ coming as King to save us took place in the past and His coming to distribute His gifts occurs now in the present, the banner still says, “The King of Kings Draws Near.” Jesus is coming in the future in a way different than how He came in the past and how He comes in the present. He still will come as the Son of God. However, in the future, He will come as Judge with power and might and glory.

His goal will be different. He will not come to forgive sin and save people. Instead, He will come to judge sin and condemn those who have refused to believe or rejected Him. He will come to rescue His people who, by faith, have been waiting for Him to return and have generously shared the Gospel and lovingly served their neighbor.

His method will be different as well. As we have heard of Jesus in the previous weeks, He will no longer be a meek and humble King, riding on a donkey, to serve people. Rather, He will be a just Judge who punishes and rewards. He will send those who have rejected Him into eternal punishment in the fire prepared for the devil and his angels. However, he will invite us and all who believe in Him and have been blessed by His Father to inherit the kingdom prepared for us from the foundation of the world.

This certainly helps narrow down the answer to the question, “How do you like your King?” This King Jesus – who has come, who comes, and who will come again – is unique. This King comes to give to us and not to take from us. He comes to serve us, rather than forcing us to serve Him.

This King deals with eternal matters, not temporary earthly matters. Although our earthly problems may, at times, seem very important and difficult, they just do not compare with the seriousness of eternal issues. While we are concerned with issues of health, money, world peace, and other things which earthly kings deal with, Jesus comes to deal with matters such as our relationship with God, life, and eternity which only He can do anything about.

This King always emerges triumphant – always – unlike any other earthly king. By His identity as the Son of God which is sometimes hidden in an innocent Baby in a manger, in a suffering man on a cross, or in ordinary bread and wine; by His power which is sometimes hidden in suffering and death; And by His resurrection from the

dead; He always wins, in anything and in everything, now and for all eternity, for us and all Christians.

The question really isn't, "How do you like your King?" This isn't some trivial matter like how to have your eggs prepared and has nothing to do with what you "like". The important question is what kind of King does the most for you. No other King can do more than give you eternal life – no earthly kings; no cute King; not even Jesus, the cute baby in the manger, the popular Rabbi, the miracle worker, or even the center of attention at a parade. Only Jesus Christ, the Son of God, crucified on the cross for your sins and risen again for your eternal life can do it. He has done it. He is doing it. He will return and bring it to completion. That's a King, not only to like, but to worship, serve, and follow into eternity. Amen.