

His Name Shall Be Called - Mighty God

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Micah 5:2-5

*But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah,
who are one of the little clans of Judah,
from you shall come forth for me
one who is to rule in Israel,
whose origin is from of old,
from ancient days.
Therefore he shall give them up until the time
when she who is in labor has brought forth;
then the rest of his kindred shall return
to the people of Israel.
And he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the LORD,
in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God.
And they shall live secure, for now he shall be great
to the ends of the earth; and he shall be the one of peace.
If the Assyrians come into our land
and tread upon our soil,
we will raise against them seven shepherds
and eight installed as rulers. (Micah 5:2-5 (NRSV))*

Let's pray together. *Gracious God open us up. Open our eyes that we might see and open our ears that we might hear your words in the midst of these words today and open our hearts that we might feel. And then, O Lord, open our hands that we might, in response to your love, serve others. In the name of Christ. Amen.*

We have some people in our church who are aficionados, or fans, or connoisseurs of Disney World – you know, the Magic Kingdom. They get season passes, they make multiple trips each year for multiple days, and they have a great time. They love it there. It is a marvelous place. Everything is clean, everyone's happy. It's just wonderful. It's the Magic Kingdom.

The question I have is if it's the Magic Kingdom, who is king? Is it Walt Disney? Is it Mickey Mouse? Maybe Mickey Mouse is the king. There is a castle there and so someone must live in the castle to be king in the Magic Kingdom. I don't know who it is. I heard maybe that in 2018 Burger King became a significant sponsor of Disney and so maybe it's that Burger King guy, who is the king in the Magic Kingdom. I just don't know.

Isn't it strange though to have a kingdom without a king?

We've been talking about who Jesus is. Christmas is coming, which is the birth of Jesus, and it is a marvelous sentimental time for us. It's so full of emotion, and memories, and all of those wonderful things. But one of the things we have to do is to continue to dig deeper than that sentiment and take hold of the real meaning of it. The real essence of it. Who is this Jesus who has come into our world? What is his identity? What does it mean that he's born?

We've been looking at four of the roles or components of Jesus' identity. Sometimes it's called the kingly office of Jesus and there are four roles – Prophet, Priest, King, and Child. We talked about Jesus as Prophet, he's the one who speaks to us on behalf of God, who gives us a word from God, who teaches us. He is our Priest in that he intercedes with God for us. The Prophet speaks from God to us, the Priest is the one who speaks *to* God *for* us. But today, we want to talk about Jesus as our King. What does that mean?

So, what does a king do anyway? A king lives in a castle, a king marries a queen, a king sits on a throne. What does a king do?

Well, today I want to talk about three things that King Jesus does. The first one is - a king rules. The Scripture we read today from the Prophet Micah says as he talks about Bethlehem, "From you shall come forth for me one who is to rule in Israel." Jesus rules.

Last year the artist Kanye West released an album that became a big hit, and it was called "Jesus is King." Now I don't know anything about Kanye West, about his spiritual journey and I don't mean to disparage it. I am suspect I guess by all of the merchandising since I can buy hoodies, hats, and sweatpants and crew neck sweaters, and even socks that say, "Jesus is King." But you can buy a St. Luke's United Methodist Church t-shirt, so it isn't that being able to buy merchandise somehow makes you less real or pure. I'm a little more suspect by his statement that he says, "I am unquestionably, undoubtedly, the greatest human artist of all time." That makes me wonder.

But I want to make sure that we don't confuse the message and the messenger. Because sometimes the message might reach some people. I was reading about his album "Jesus is King." And this is the way it's been described in one of the entertainment columns: "*Jesus is King* relies on a 5 one 5 structure with the middle song *Everything We Need* serving as a pivot point. In the front half, Kanye wants to live a life in service of Christ, but his efforts are still complicated by

ego and fear. Those hurdles vanish after the epiphany that is *Everything We Need*. With his path clarified, the back half of *Jesus Is King* sees West praise, repent and serve.”

That’s not a bad message. This idea that in fact when we recognize that Jesus is king there is a response that means we need to make Jesus king in our own lives. Pope Pius XI in 1922 used some language that I thought was a marvelous picture of what it means to say that Jesus is King. He said, “For Jesus Christ reigns over the minds of individuals with his teaching, in their hearts by his love, and in each one’s life by the living according to his law and imitating his example.” *In our minds by his teaching, in our hearts by his love, in our lives by his law and his teaching.*

Here’s the hard thing. We don’t really like kings and in the United States particularly. In 1776 we threw off the king; we think that we need to have some say in our own lives. We don’t need people telling us what to do, that we have the ability, the power of self-determination. We get to decide what we want to do, whether we can live by our consciences, by our own decisions, by our values. Each one of us gets to do that on our own and that’s all well and good. But the problem is that that’s not the Biblical example, is it?

It’s not the word that we get from Scripture. The funny thing is that in our modern sensibilities it’s not really that we see kings as so terrible and powerful. No, for us kings now are more anachronistic, they’re decorative. We think of kings as symbolic, and so we love to follow the Royals and fawn over them and talk about how wonderful they are. But they don’t really have any power. They don’t really make any difference.

And the sad thing is that’s how many of us treat Christ the King. To say Christ is King means that we lift up his name and we talk about him, but we don’t give him power over our lives. We don’t make him sovereign.

Dee and I have been watching “The Crown” on Netflix. We’ve now made it over the years through four seasons. And in a recent episode, there is this conversation between Margaret, who is the Queen’s sister, and this man that she thought she’d fallen in love with. He has converted to Catholicism and decided to become a Roman Catholic priest. Now while this conversation has to do with Catholicism, I think it applies just as well to Christianity as a whole. Here’s what he says when he’s sort of challenging her that maybe she needs something that matters in her life. He explains the change that had come over him. He says, “Before I became Catholic, I attended church. After I converted, I found a faith. The difference is night and day...” He goes on: “One

cannot fully receive God until one has submitted to something larger. The moment I did, I found something more than happiness. I found ecstasy.”

So, I don’t know. There are lots of us who go to church, but we really haven’t found that faith in submitting ourselves to making God sovereign in our lives.

N.T. Wright, an incredible author, and leader says that when we say the Lord’s Prayer “Thy Kingdom come, Thy Will be done on earth as it is in heaven...” that we are signing up for the Kingdom of God. We’re pledging our allegiance, we’re saying, “I am submitting myself to the rule of God in my life. And I pray that it comes to pass in the whole world.”

To say, “Jesus is King” is to say, “Jesus rules and is sovereign in our lives.”

Now here’s the second thing. To say “Jesus is King” ... so what does a king do? A king cares for his people. To say “Jesus is King” is to say Jesus cares for us.

Here’s the thing. Really, the Biblical narrative tells the story about Israel and kings. Israel was ruled for many years, for centuries, by judges and they were leaders of their individual clan. But they weren’t king – God was the only king. There came a time when the people come to the prophet Samuel and they say, “We want a king like other nations have.” Then God speaks through the prophet Samuel to them and he says, “You don’t really want a king. You think you want a king, but you really don’t want a king because here’s what a king’s going to do: A king will take your sons and make them run in front of his chariot. He’s going to take your daughters and make them perfumers and bakers in his kingdom. He’s going to take your best olive groves and he’s going to take your best fields. And you’re going to become his slaves. You don’t really want a king.” And they said, “Yes, we do! We want a king like other nations!” God said to Samuel, “Give them a king.” Samuel anointed King Saul and it just didn’t go well.

But then a new king came, King David. And this king was shaped by his primary identity as a shepherd. That his job was to care for Israel as a shepherd cares for his sheep. David was the Shepherd-King. And that became the motif, the model. What did we just hear? By the time the Prophet Micah speaks they’ve already had King David and he has set what a king does. Again, here’s what the Scripture says, “And he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God.” (Micah 5:4). So, he is to be that shepherd king. That motif continues to run through, and you see it over and over again in the prophets.

Let me share this from Isaiah 40, which you're probably familiar with since it's one of the most familiar passages of Scripture. It says, "Comfort, comfort my people." and it ends up "And you shall mount up with wings as eagles..." And the middle of that passage it says, "See, the Lord God comes with might, and his arm rules for him; his reward is with him, and his recompense before him." (Isaiah 40:10-11). So, he's a ruler, a king rules. Then it says, "He will feed his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms, and carry them in his bosom, and gently lead the mother sheep." (Isaiah 40:10-11).

In the prophet Ezekiel God is speaking: "I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I will make them lie down, says the Lord God. I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak." (Ezekiel 34:15-16).

Not less than 90 times in Scripture does it talk about the shepherd king, that God is our shepherd as our king.

There is a marvelous hymn we sing here at St. Luke's periodically and it's based on the 23rd Psalm, "The king of love my shepherd is, whose goodness never faileth, I nothing lack if I am his, and he is mine forever."

Oh, how we long for a shepherd to lead us! To find us when we're lost. To feed us when we're hungry. To water us when our spirits are dry. To lay us down to rest when we're weary. To strengthen us when we're weak. To protect us when we're afraid. We long for a shepherd.

In this time of the coronavirus, people have been struggling. Not everyone for sure, but the social isolation has been difficult, there have been mental health challenges. The loneliness can be overwhelming. Relationships can be strained. A community broken down. Businesses struggling. Grief from the loss of people who passed away from the virus. Yet at the same time, while the isolation takes its toll, we certainly don't want to get sick and we don't want to make anyone else sick. Of course, we don't want to make anyone else sick, so we're stuck in this dilemma, this quagmire of not knowing exactly how to move forward and how to build that balance. And oh, my goodness! We need a shepherd to lead us!

Now listen, when we say: "God is on the throne as the shepherd" sometimes what we hear is, "Well, that means that everything is going to be all right. That everything that happens is God-ordained. And that God's controlling everything and moving everything around on the chessboard. And whatever happens, was God's will. So, we don't need to worry because God's

controlling everything.” I don’t think that’s what it means to say that Jesus is on the throne. I think what it means is to say is that no matter what happens I’m going to be okay. We’re going to be okay. That even if the worst thing happens that we’re going to be okay.

I’ve struggled over all my ministry – it’s so interesting – to find the words to express that sense of well being that comes with that relationship, that personal relationship with the Shepherd. To know that you have one who leads you and cares for you and carries you in his bosom. It’s certainly not that nothing bad will happen to you. It’s certainly not that you’ll never grieve or ever experience hardship, or you’ll never be broken. Or that nothing bad will happen. That there’s this cone of protection around you that keeps anything bad from happening. The world makes that clear. But what it does mean is that through all of that we have this sense that God is with us and we’ll be okay. I can’t find the words so all I can say is, “taste and see. Taste and see that sense of well being that comes with knowing that the shepherd king cares for you.”

A king rules, a king cares for his people, and the third thing is that a king brings peace. Here’s the Scripture, “And he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they shall live secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth; and he shall be the one of peace.” (Micah 5:5).

This is from the prophet Micah and elsewhere in his book there is this prophecy and you probably know it from a song. “And into ploughshares beat their swords; nations shall see war no more. And every man ‘neath his vine and fig tree shall live in peace and unafraid.” This sense that it isn’t just that I’ll be okay because God is king, it’s that *we’ll* be okay when God is king.

In our Pastor’s Bible Study, we’ve been studying the prophet Isaiah and last week we looked at the idea of a Messianic age. The prophets continue to talk about when there’ll be a day when the Messiah comes that they call the Messianic Age. There are six components of that. One is a King like David who would reign in righteousness and justice. The second component is the worldwide knowledge of the Lord. The third is the return of all the exiles to Israel and the preeminence of Zion and Jerusalem. The fourth is a time of global peace, the fifth is an end - the defeat - of all evil, and the sixth component is an end to all suffering.

A time of global peace. Is that what we see? Has the Messiah come?

The year was 1862 and the Civil War was raging, and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow was grieving the death of his second wife. He had just received word that his son had been gravely wounded on the battlefield. He sat down and wrote this poem:

“I heard the bells on Christmas day
Their old familiar carols play
And mild and sweet their songs repeat
Of peace on earth good-will to all.

And in despair, I bowed my head
There is no peace on earth I said
For hate is strong and mocks the song
Of peace on earth, good-will to all.”

We can look around and see that peace has not come. We only have to turn on the news. But what that says is that the Kingdom of God is not yet fulfilled. Jesus, the Prince of Peace, the King of Peace, came to bring that peace and to inaugurate the kingdom. It has begun but not yet been fulfilled. So, whenever we see peace made, we know that is the King, that God is at work. When we see nations sit down together and make peace that is the King, that is Jesus the King of Peace, the Prince of Peace at work. When we see groups of people who differing views and different perspectives come together and figure out a way forward together that is the King at work. When we see relationships, friendships, that have been broken, come and be reconciled, that is the King of Peace at work. When we see families, who are stuck in conflict work through that conflict in their homes... In the marriage ceremony, we say that your home may be a haven of blessing and a place of peace. When we see that conflict work through that that is the King at work. When we strive.

The truth is that that Kingdom of Peace will come when all of us decide that we will make God sovereign in our lives. Submit to his purposes and his will for us.

We sing a hymn that I love:
“Lead on, O King eternal,
till sin's fierce war shall cease,
and holiness shall whisper
the sweet Amen of peace;
for not with swords' loud clashing

nor roll of stirring drums,
but deeds of love and mercy,
thy reign of peace shall come.”

Friends, the Kingdom of God is not a magic kingdom. It doesn't just magically come to pass. The kingdom of God comes because God is at work and will finally be fulfilled when we make God sovereign. When we embrace this shepherd, who cares for us so much. And when we decide that we'll be a part of this work to bring peace on earth, goodwill to all.

Let's pray together. *Gracious God, we confess that too often we have treated you like the royalty of today, made you decorative in our lives. Symbolic in some way. We come to church, but we have not made you sovereign, and we have not submitted our will to yours. We have not signed up for the Kingdom of God that your will be done on earth as in heaven. Forgive us, help us to feel your arms of love and care around us that we might submit to your will and that we might be agents of your peace on earth. In the name of Christ, we pray. Amen.*