

Make Him King?

John 6:1-27

Cradock Presbyterian Church

November 25, 2012

Today is Christ the King Sunday, sort of “Advent Eve,” if you want a short-hand way to think about it. It’s a good idea, to put this particular Sunday right before Advent; we get Epiphany Sunday right after Advent, so it’s sort of like bookends. It all makes sense. Advent is about the coming of the infant Jesus; Epiphany is about the coming of the three kings who recognize him as a king. So starting off by saying, “Christ is king” makes all the sense in the world.

I say that because you know as well as I do that the Christmas season is chock full of images of the baby Jesus. And angels swirling around; and shepherds; and those three kings, though we know they were really kinda late to the party. No actual images about a king, though we hear some words.

I guess that might be a good thing, because earthly kings – well, maybe we don’t want the Son of God associated with *those* images. Kings were, and sometimes still are, associated with armies; and power; and war; and sometimes with things like ethnic cleansing and massacres and torture and barbaric executions. Kings are usually kinda self-absorbed. Their world revolves around them. They don’t worry about others too much, and certainly not about the common riff-raff. You know, people like you and me.

Instead of one of those guys, we get a guy like Jesus. A guy who would go around healing and teaching, even teaching all day long. And when evening came, and the crowds were hungry, he would have compassion on them, he wouldn’t want to send them away hungry. Even if it might put him at risk, he would do something for them. I

know John's version of this story doesn't mention the compassion he had on the crowd, but the other versions do; this is the only miracle story that's in all four gospels in almost exactly the same form, even down to the number of people. We read that the people "kept following him, because of the signs that he was doing for the sick." Everybody likes a good show! And especially when it displays concern for people like themselves. And now Jesus was going to demonstrate *real* concern, for everyone, because he was going to take care of everyone. John even says of Jesus, in his text, that "he himself knew what he was going to do." He knew they were hungry. Jesus always knows what's going on with us. He knew how to take care of things, and how to make a point. You know he could have turned rocks into bread, if he'd have wanted to. Hey, that would have shown REAL power, like any good king would want to do! He'd have scared the heck out of 'em, and got 'em to fall in line. Again, showing might, like any earthly king. But what did he do? He had a young boy share his lunch; he made the point that when we share, great things happen. He made the point that we should be caring for each other. Then we'd have all that we need. Oh yeah, he made the point, too, that his power came from God, because the miracle didn't happen until *after* he'd offered prayer.

Too bad the people didn't get the point. What they got was the drama. What they were into was the glitter, the flash, the sparkle. "Man, did you see THAT! He made food for one into food for 5000! Dude!" There was this stirring, then this rumble, and then something like the beginnings of a riot. Jesus saw what was happening, and he beat a hasty retreat. John says it all nice and short:

“When Jesus realized that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain by himself.”

At this point in the story, we’ve just heard mention of the second Passover, so we can guess that he’s been on the road preaching and teaching for two years or so. People know who he is and they’ve heard about his message. But they want to make him king *because of the bread!* Jesus even says so, as you heard me read from the passage. He was right, of course. All the gospels agree that the people never did “get it” while he was alive; only some “got it” after he was raised from the dead. In this place, at this time, the people only “get” what they want to “get.” They see Jesus only as they want to see him: the king of their dreams. They’re focused on how good he’s making them feel.

And I wonder how many of us actually “get it” today. I wonder if we ever get beyond the glitter and flash and sparkle to the point of making Jesus anything at all.

Except what we want him to be.

See, those people gathered around Jesus all knew what they wanted in a king. They wanted *power!* They wanted somebody who looked and acted the part of a conqueror. They wanted somebody who would say, “March!” and everybody would march, even if they weren’t sure where they were going. They didn’t want somebody who was a softy, and they darn sure didn’t want somebody who sat around and *taught* all day! Their king, the one they fantasized about, the one they lit their Hanukkah candles in celebration to, in a sense, was going to wipe out the Romans, wipe out their

poverty, restore their kingdom, and bring on the glory days. Glitter, flash, and sparkle, baby! Make us feel good!

Just what we've made Jesus into, if not all year 'round, then certainly at Christmas. And I'm sure he ain't too happy about it. Probably just as unhappy as he was when those well-fed people by the sea tried to snatch him off and make him king.

"Cause here's the thing: Jesus isn't the first thing you think about when you think about Christmas. It's a celebration of his birth, but he's not the first thing you think about, not if you're like most folks. The first thing that comes into most of our minds, when we think about Christmas, is some sort of shopping mall or shopping center. Or maybe the first image in your mind is something like Christmas ornaments or trees, something having to do with the colors of the season, the glitter, flash, and sparkle. Some folks might even think about the nativity, because that's one of their favorite things. We think about the things that make us feel good!

But do you think about Jesus himself, his life and his ministry and his teachings? More important, do you think about his cross? When you think about Christmas, do you think about his cross?

Yeah, I went there! And I bet it makes some of you uncomfortable, that I went there. I mean, come on! This is Christmas! It's a happy time! We don't need to talk about *death!* Well I'm sorry – I think we have no choice. In wanting to avoid the reality of why he came, we're just like those people who ran around the lake chasing Jesus the next day. They wanted all the feel-good stuff. They didn't want to face the hard facts he was telling them about why he'd come. They wanted him to be their kind of king, just

like we want him to be our kind of king at Christmas. The king of Toyland. The king of the retail world. The king of tinsel and garlands and colored lights and glitter and flash and sparkle.

But he wasn't that king. He was the king who came to give his life for his people. He only ascended his throne when God raised him from the dead and put him on it, a throne that no humans could ever construct, or even conceive.

You know what's powerful about all this? We all get the chance to make him king all over again. We make him king when we offer ourselves as his subjects. We do that when we submit ourselves to his rule. We do it when we willingly do his bidding, by teaching what he commands and turning others to him, just as he's asked us to do. The more we do that, the more we establish his kingdom in the here and now.

So we have to make a choice this Advent and Christmas season. We have to decide where our allegiance lies. Do we give it to the world and all its pressures – to the glitter, flash, and sparkle? In other words, to our own desire to feel good? Or do we give it to this most unusual, not-of-this-world king, who gives US a present more valuable than all the presents in the world?