

Jeremiah 23:1-6; Psalm 46; Colossians 1:11-20; Luke 23:33-43

Grace to you and peace from God who is, who was, and who is to come. Amen.

In our two texts that we heard tonight, we get two almost polar opposite views. First, we get this story, this vision of a king gone bad and in our second reading we get a description of a King beyond all understanding. And since this IS Christ the King Sunday, these are very appropriate.

Now in our lesson from Jeremiah almost sounds like a late night cable show filled with a paparazzi footage of royalty and embarrassing situation: "KINGS GONE BAD." But in the text that we heard tonight God laments over the loss of good shepherds to watch over the people of Israel. God is especially disappointed in Jehoiakim (it is a weird sounding name, but he was king and he ruled about 600 years before Jesus). Now Jehoiakim abused his people through misrule, through unrighteousness, through injustice and economic oppression, and what we might call today creative accounting. When the powerful Pharaoh of Egypt demanded that the nation pay 100 talents of silver and one talent of gold, Jehoiakim raised the money by levying a tax upon the whole land (We read about this back in 2 Kings 23). Worse than that, he kept some of the money that he raised to upgrade his own personal living space. He was a bad, bad king; or, in the words that we heard from Jeremiah, a bad, bad, shepherd. As we heard from Jeremiah,

"It is you who have scattered my flock," charges the Lord, "and have driven them away. You have not attended to them, so I will attend to you for your evil doings, says the Lord. (Jeremiah 23:2)

God promises to gather the remnant of the flock (the people who had been sent into exile, and are now going to return). God promises to put the people under the care of a new generation of the kings - kings who will be good shepherds and will watch over their people, protect them, and keep them from getting lost. Better still, God promises to

"raise up for David a righteous Branch, that he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land." (Jeremiah 23:5)

Now that righteous Branch is none other than Jesus the Christ, the one who was born (as we will celebrate at Christmas) as King of Kings and Lord of lords. Jesus comes to reign with justice and righteousness, and to provide safety for all of God's people. This is why he is called: "The LORD is our righteousness." (Jeremiah 23:6) Now "the Lord is our righteousness" . . . it's an odd name . . . it's uncomfortable in our modern ears. It's an Old Testament reference to the One King, the Royal Savior, the one who will herald the "Day of the Lord", the coming of the anticipated Messiah, when all those who are enemies of YHWH, all those who are enemies of the Almighty will be put down and ALL who believe in the Almighty will be saved. That militaristic Messiah is who the people of Israel were looking for. What they got, instead, a few hundred years later was, Jesus.

In our text from Colossians, we jump from "Kings Behaving Badly" to "King Gonna Do Good." In a letter to the Colossians, Paul was writing to a congregation that was kind of confused, and he realized that he needed to bring in some heavenly language to

combat the worship of the heavenly beings that was going on there in Colossae. The community there was worshiping God, but was also worshiping angels and beings of the air. And Paul, in his letter (which is short, you can read the whole thing in twenty minutes, go home and do that tonight), Paul reminds the Colossians that they aren't worshipping the heavenly beings, but rather the One Being. The One who is Powerful, the One who is Over all. The One who is beyond our comprehension, even though we still try to comprehend that One. That's where we get starting in verse 15 in our second reading tonight, this wonderful hymn that Paul wrote.

He is the image of the invisible God, the first born of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers -- all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have a first place in everything. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile himself to all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of the cross. (Colossians 1:15-20)

Much more simply, Christ is God. He was in the beginning, at the creation. He is God Incarnate, God in fleshed. He is our redeemer, the One who saves us of our sins. Christ is our King. The king about whom Jeremiah wrote. The One King who we follow, who we worship, who we believe.

This language might be a little confusing because we don't think in terms of kings. We need to realize that as Followers of Christ, we live, shall we say in two "kingdoms." Perhaps a better, twenty-first century description might be two "dimensions," or two "realms." But whatever imagery you need to understand these two areas that we relate too: the world in which we live, and the Christ in whom we believe. And the one calls us to serve the other. We are called to follow, not Ed Rendell, or George W. Bush; not Tony Blair, or Bin Ladan, or whomever. We are called as believers to follow Christ. Christ in turn calls us to follow our earthly, worldly leaders, so long, and this is the important part, so long as what we are called to do does not go against Christ. This is the two kingdoms that Martin Luther wrote about. We are called to serve the leaders of the world, not have them serve us. Now personally, that is where I disagree with some of our brothers and sisters in Christ who came out in mass in this last election and saying "I believe, so you have to follow my understanding of scripture." As I understand this day, this Christ the King, as I understand Christ, we are called **to** believe, to **live out** what we believe, to live as a **witness** of that belief, so that others might see Christ in us. Not to force our belief of Christ upon others, but to live as a witness of what Christ **is** doing in our lives and **can** do for others. It's NOT an easy thing, I will very readily admit that; still, we are called to live our lives in that way. God has given us intelligence, and calls us to use that intelligence.

This Christ the King Sunday, as I said earlier in my announcements, it ends our church year. We haven't always celebrated it, it's only a recent thing. It was only really begun to be followed in the early 1900's, but now those brothers and sisters in Christ who follow, as the Lutherans do, the liturgical calendar, we celebrate this day together. We are joined, Presbyterians and Methodists and Episcopalians and Roman Catholics, we are joined together on this day as we are on all days, but this day recalls us and

reminds us together we do not have those separate divisions. We are not divided by Rome or Chicago or St. Louis, or where ever church head bodies may be. We are called together to serve our One God. And so let us this day celebrate Christ as King. For he is our King, our leader, our ruler, he calls us to service, to act as witnesses, to spread the message of his love, of his grace, of his forgiveness, to everyone regardless of their race, or their gender, or orientation or their political party, or whatever. We are called together to be united in Christ. With Christ as our King, may we go forth in his name. Amen.