

Christ the King Sunday, Year C

Nov. 24, 2019

St. James Episcopal Church, Wheat Ridge

[Jeremiah 23:1-6; Psalm 46; Colossians 1:11-20; Luke 23:33-43](#)

By the Rev. Becky Jones

The third season of the hit Netflix series “The Crown”

Was released a week ago, last Sunday.

Anybody watched any of it yet?

The series is a fictionalized account

Of the life and reign of Queen Elizabeth,

Starting with her marriage to Prince Phillip in 1947,

And it’s projected to last

Right on up to the present day.

The third season opens in 1964,

And will take us into the 1970s.

It follows Elizabeth as she leads her country

And her family through a series of crises.

Had this been any other week but THIS week,

When I’ve been more than a little distracted

By yesterday’s festivities,

I bet I would have binge-watched

At least three or four of the episodes by now.

As it is, I’ve only had time to watch the first episode,

Which is entitled “Olding.”

The title refers both to the queen’s reaching middle age,

AND to a spy scandal

At the heart of the British establishment.

The episode opens with Elizabeth inspecting a new portrait of herself.

It’s the image that’s going to be going onto the postage stamps.

It will replace the image of the young princess.

She’s now an older Elizabeth.

The new portrait is supposed to convey a sense of majesty,

The profile of a settled monarch.

But Elizabeth looks at it and the first words she says are  
“old bat.”

But that’s how she looked.

Who among us really prefers how we look now

To how we looked 10 years ago?

Fortunately, none of us have to look at our mugs

On stamps and on currency.

Elizabeth was no longer that young princess

That took the throne at 25.

And it was important that her official portrait reflect reality.

The portrait must show her “true colors.”

True colors is also a central theme later in the episode

When a KGB agent is discovered within the royal household.

Turns out the guy in charge of her art collection is a spy.

Elizabeth is furious, wants to see him hanged for treason.

But MI5 advises her not to fire him or take any action against him,

So as to avoid compromising counterintelligence operations.

So this known traitor continued to serve in Buckingham Palace

for another 15 years,

and the story of his treachery didn’t come out until 1979.

Elizabeth just quietly had to put up with it,

swallow her anger, and keep her outrage to herself.

It was what her country needed her to do,

No matter how painful and repugnant to her.

Shakespeare was no doubt right when he said,

“Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown.”

England has been blessed to have someone like Elizabeth

sitting on the throne for all these years.

She’s proven to be an exceptional queen.

But the throne of England is actually pretty cushy

Compared to some thrones out there.

There was once a throne so uncomfortable, so dangerous, so frightening,

that it took not just a queen or a king, but a god,

to claim it, and to reign from it.

Our gospel reading from Luke today

tells the story of three men

dying on crosses.  
One of them is angry.  
One of them is repentant.  
And the third is, as Paul tells us,  
“the firstborn of all creation.”  
But he, too, is dying on a cross.

And the repentant man  
sees the sign above Jesus’ head:  
“This is the king of the Jews.”  
So he makes a request of Jesus:  
“Remember me when you come into your kingdom.”  
And Jesus gives him a promise.  
“Today,” he says, “you will be with me in Paradise.”

And in that response, we see  
just what kind of king has claimed  
the most awful throne in history.  
We begin to see Jesus’s true colors  
at this most vulnerable and pitiful moment.

During his lifetime, Jesus rarely revealed his divine identity.  
Like Elizabeth, he kept things close to the vest.  
Most of the time, he chose the way of humility.  
He showed his lordship  
not through awesome majesty and conspicuous displays of divine perks  
but through serving, and healing, and loving the unloved.

Yet even before he claimed the cross as his throne,  
we get a few glimpses of the glory that was truly his.  
The stories of his birth hinted at this,  
at what the writer of the letter to the Colossians  
would finally affirm many years later:  
That “in him all things in heaven and on earth were created.”  
This was the glory that was his birthright,  
but it was hard to claim in a manger.

A few people saw that glory on the day when he was baptized,  
and the Holy Spirit appeared and announced,  
“you are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”

That was an announcement fit for a king's son,  
but only a privileged few got to hear it.

Peter, James and John got to see this glory in advance of the cross  
when they accompanied Jesus up the mountain  
and saw him transfigured.

The closest most people ever got to seeing the true colors of Jesus  
was during his triumphal entry into Jerusalem,  
when they lay their cloaks and palm branches down before him,  
and shouted Hosanna.

At last, he received a welcome fit for a king.

Then comes this moment at the crucifixion  
when he assures the penitent thief of a place in paradise.

That's something only a king could do.

Even if the only person who recognizes his kingship at that moment  
is a dying thief, who hangs beside him.

Jesus is now fully coming into his kingdom.

So why is it, when we are just about ready

To enter Advent,

to start preparing for the coming of the Baby Jesus,  
why is it we spend this last Sunday of the Christian year  
reading about Jesus's crucifixion?

The answer has to do with faithfulness,  
and how we're to act as the people of God;  
how we're to BE the church.

In today's passage from Jeremiah,

God rebukes the shepherds of Israel.

Only they're not really shepherds,

they're really the religious leaders of Jeremiah's time.

He says they're not attending to their sheep.

They're not being the community God wants them to be.

So God promises to raise up a king

who will be wise and just and righteous.

When we, as Christians, look back on these passages in Jeremiah,  
we see in the words of the prophet the foretelling of the coming of Christ.

We see Christ as this King of Peace.

The letter from Paul to the Colossians  
takes up this image of the king  
and expands it,  
to give us a picture of Christ who is not just a king of our world  
but the king of all creation.

And finally, Paul says that  
“through him, God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things...  
making peace through the blood of his cross.”  
This adds a new layer to our understanding  
of faithfulness and kingship.

When we celebrate Christ the King,  
we’re celebrating a king who is, above all, a reconciler.  
This is a king who comes to show us how to live  
as a people of God in the kingdom of God.  
A king who shows us how to BE the church,  
how to BE his body in the world.

He made peace through the blood of the cross.  
This is not peace as the world sees it.  
This is not triumph as the world sees it.  
In order to see the peace and the triumph of Christ,  
we need to look with the eyes of faith and hope and love.  
We need to look with eyes that have sought and found forgiveness,  
We need to look with the eyes of a dying thief  
who asked only to be remembered,  
yet was given a king’s inheritance.

There is a throne where all the fullness of God is pleased to dwell.  
It is an uncomfortable throne,  
a throne that no ruler will ever occupy carelessly.  
It is the throne of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords,  
the throne of the Prince of Peace,  
a throne that stands between despair and hope,  
between anger and repentance,  
between heaven and hell.

The king that occupies that throne  
makes the same promise to us  
that he made on that awful coronation day 2,000 years ago.  
He turns his head to us  
and promises us a place with him in paradise.  
No questions asked.  
No credentials needed.

This, after all, is the king,  
who went down to hell and came back out,  
leaving the door open behind him.  
The invitation is ours to accept.

Amen.