

“King of Kings”

The Rev. Drew M. Willard
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Psalm 145:10-18

John 6:1-21

‘All creation will thank you, and your loyal people will praise you.

They will tell about your marvelous kingdom and your power.

Psalm 145:10-11

Let us pray... O God,

‘All glory, laud, and honor’ seem quaint words of adoration.

Help us to define your greatness in our own words for our own time.

Help us to recognize your sovereignty amidst a world that is often so chaotic.

Help us to see the miraculous in the simple beauty of flowers,

in the relief that shows up at the 11th hour,

in your undefeated love, your prevailing compassion.

Amen

Can I get an ‘Amen’? ... Can I get a ‘Glory! Hallelujah!’? ...

Praise the Lord! ...

We don’t do too much of that spontaneous, exclamatory praise

that characterizes conservative, evangelical worship.

But when we do, it’s kind of fun! Isn’t it?

Maybe our reticence has something to do with our Puritan/New England roots
or our Reformed/Midwestern heartland with a quasi-Lutheran influence
that values self denial and the Protestant work ethic.

Yet, because of this sober approach to our tradition,

we tend to downplay the occasion to celebrate the greatness of God.

Now, don’t get me wrong, because I personally lean toward

that more private understanding of relating to God –

that is experienced in those calm, meditative moments,

yet also, in the dynamic rush and flurry of life.

But every now and then,

I do need to be reminded of the greatness of God,

prevailing over life’s grim realities and anxious uncertainties.

And that greatness has traditionally been attributed to God in terms of being

“Lord of Lords” and “King of Kings”

Willard, p.2

Royalty is something we Americans are especially unaccustomed to
when it comes to respect for unquestioned authority.

Case in point was the 1908 Olympic parade in London where every national team
dipped its flag while passing in review before the English king –
except our flag bearer!

Well after all, we did fight two wars about that very issue,
though these days, it would be more of a philosophical point
rather than a political one considering the strong
diplomatic and cultural friendship the United States and Great Britain enjoy.

Still, Americans tend to be a little resentful of authority –
just check out the news for how little regard we have for our political leaders.

No slack for past sins, birth certificates, or business practices –
basically the kind of standards that nobody can meet 100%.

We Americans don't suffer would-be kings & queens – let alone fools, very lightly.

So, what are we to do in understanding the tradition of referring to
God as our 'Lord' and 'King of Kings'?

'Lords' like 'Kings' & 'Queens' are not easily translatable
in light of world history as well as American history.

There have been very few kings over the millennia who were not violent brutes
or mere figureheads these days – though a marvelous exception
was King Haakon VII of Norway.

When the Nazis invaded Norway they pressured Haakon to cease resistance
and hand over power to a puppet government.

King Haakon said in a statement to Norway's Council of State
that – as a democratic body it was their decision to make,
but if they did – he would abdicate.

This gave the Norwegian Government the determination to resist.
According to Nils Hjelmtveit, Minister of Church and Education:

"This made a great impression on us all.

*More clearly than ever before we could see
the man behind the words;*

*the king who had drawn a line for himself and his task,
a line from which he could not deviate.*

*We had through the five years [in government]
learned to respect and appreciate our king*

*and now, through his words, he came to us as a great man,
just and forceful; a leader in these fatal times to our country".*

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Haakon_VII_of_Norway

Willard, p.3

Brian McLaren is a contemporary theologian and author who was the keynote speaker at the Florida Conference Annual Meeting this year. In his book, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, he reflects on the desire for a *good* king:

‘...if you are living in danger and chaos, to say,
“A good king will soon be in control,” would be good news.
‘But it’s not good news at all if you live, as we do, at the end of modernity,
a period that told us in a hundred different ways how
we’re *already controlled*:
by our genes..., by class struggle...,
by primitive psychosexual aggressions...,
by [behavior] conditioning..., by... Darwinism..., ...colonialism...,
... industrialism..., and ... consumerism [to name a few]...
[And] talking about God as the all-powerful, all-controlling Lord/King
is just more bad news, reducing us to
plastic chessmen... , puppets on strings...,
characters in a video game..., cogs in a contraption
whose levers and buttons God and
God alone pulls and pushes.’

In our Gospel lesson today from John 6,
when Jesus brought about the miracle of feeding more than 5,000 people
with a few loaves of bread and some fish,
the crowd wanted to make him king, but he slipped away
because they really didn’t understand
who he was and the nature of his power.

And we’re like those people back then – so quick to give up our freedom
to those who would gladly monopolize our resources
of energy, finance, transportation, and media –
like the brutal kings of old and their unqualified heirs.

Mc Laren goes on to say that:

‘*Good* news under these conditions would be a leader
who liberated us
from all determinisms,
who deconstructed
oppressive authority and the self-interest
of leaders and nations,

Willard, p.4

who destabilized the status quo
and made way for a better day,
who delivered us not only from corrupt power,
but also from the whole approach to power
that is so corruptible...

‘...which is exactly [McLaren says...]
what is meant by the phrase “Jesus is Lord.”

Back in the 1st Century CE, for people living in the Roman Empire,
saying, “Caesar is Lord” was like the salutation,
“Heil Hitler” in Nazi Germany.

But Brian McLaren makes the point that to call Jesus “Lord”
was to equate him with Caesar or even to say,

‘...there is a power in Jesus more important than
the power of the king of the greatest state in history.

To say, “Jesus is Lord” was then (and should be now!)

a profoundly political statement –
affirming the authority of a “powerless” Jewish rabbi with scarred feet
over the power of Caesar himself
with all his swords, spears, chariots, and crosses.’

We live in a world corrupted and co-opted by various powers,
but it is up to us to recognize the miracle
of what true greatness is about.

And celebrate it when we find it perhaps when we behold natural wonders
like the Grand Canyon, stand before a mighty Sequoia,
or witness the birth of a child.

Perhaps you heard me tell about a visit I made to
the American Museum of Natural History in NYC
and came into a foyer that opened into the Hall of The Dinosaurs...
and there was the skeleton of Tyrannosaurus Rex –
whose name means “Tyrant Lizard King”.

It had been a dangerous, living creature 65 million years ago,
but now – it is just bones.

For a time it had been magnificent, ferocious, untamed
like the world itself before the dominating influence of humankind.

But where did that greatness come from?

Willard, p.5

Where does the genius come from in the wings of Monarch butterflies
that carry them on migrations of thousands of miles?

Where does the sense of humor come from in the design
of poodles, slugs, and giraffes?

Where does the capacity come from for the invention
of cars, computers, synthesizers, and violins?

Where does the infinite possibilities of cooking steaks and baking cakes,
soup to nuts, where does it come from?

Where does the inspiration come from to do
microscopic surgery that saves lives
or to put men & women into outer space
to learn more about our universe –
the breadth and depth and height of Creation.

Where does the courage come from
to fight disease in some impoverished country,
or to fight poverty, insanity, and violence in our own country?

Where does the beauty of a baby's tiny hand
and the smiling face of a true friend come from?

Where does Jesus come from?

Where does what or who you are most grateful come from?

They all bear witness to the infinite power of God, the greatness of God
still speaking, still creating, still saying,
“Let there be light!”

Let there be light to illuminate the Kingdom in our midst.

Let the love of God prevail despite the powers
of oppression, illness, and death.

It is like those words of a traditional hymn that still speak to us:

*‘This is my Father’s world. O let me ne’er forget
That though the wrong seems oft so strong, God is the ruler yet.
This is my Father’s world: the battle is not done:
Jesus Who died shall be satisfied, And earth and Heav’n be one.’*

<http://www.cyberhymnal.org/htm/t/i/tismyfw.htm>

Can I get an ‘Amen’? ... Can I get a ‘Glory! Hallelujah!’? ...
Praise the Lord! ...

Amen

Psalm 145:10-18

- ¹⁰ All creation will thank you,
and your loyal people will praise you.
- ¹¹ They will tell about your marvelous kingdom
and your power.
- ¹² Then everyone will know about the mighty things you do
and your glorious kingdom.
- ¹³ Your kingdom will never end,
and you will rule forever.
- Our LORD,
you keep your word and do everything you say.
- ¹⁴ When someone stumbles or falls,
you give a helping hand.
- ¹⁵ Everyone depends on you, and when the time is right,
you provide them with food.
- ¹⁶ By your own hand
you satisfy the desires of all who live.
- ¹⁷ Our LORD, everything you do is kind and thoughtful,
¹⁸ and you are near to everyone whose prayers are sincere.

Inspired by John 6:1b-21

...Jesus crossed over the Sea of Galilee – also called Tiberius.
And following him by land was a throng of many people
 who witnessed the miracles he did for those who were afflicted.
So, Jesus climbed up to higher ground and sat down with his disciples.
 Now, it was getting close to the Jewish Passover.

Then, Jesus looked out and saw that a huge crowd was coming towards him.
 He said to Philip,
 “Where shall we buy bread for all these people to eat?”
 Yet he said this to test him, for Jesus knew what he was going to do.

Philip answered him,
 “200 denariis’ worth of bread wouldn’t be enough
 for each one of them to get even a little bit.”
One of his disciples, Andrew- the brother of Simon Peter, said to him,
 “Here’s a boy who has 5 barley loaves and 2 sets of fish filets.
 But what will that do for so many people?”

Still, Jesus said,
 “Make them all sit down and relax.”
Now, there was a grassy area for them to recline and about 5,000 of them
 sat down; and Jesus took the bread and gave thanks.

Then, the disciples distributed the bread as well as the fish
 to everyone sitting there – as much as they wanted!
So when they had enough, Jesus said,
 “Collect up all the leftover pieces and don’t miss any.”
And they crammed 12 baskets full of broken pieces
 out of 5 barley loaves, besides what had already been eaten.
When the people realized Jesus had performed a miracle, they said,
 “Truly, a prophet has come into the world!”
Then – knowing they were about to come and insist on
 setting him up to be their king, Jesus slipped away
 up to higher ground again to be alone.

When it became evening, the disciples went down to the sea
 and boarded their boat to cross back over to Capernaum.
It was already dark, but Jesus had not gone with them.
 And the sea was stirred up by a strong wind.
By the time the disciples had been rowing about 3 miles out,
 they saw Jesus walking on the sea, approaching the boat –
And they were afraid, but he said to them,
 “I am the One Who Is coming to you! Don’t be alarmed!”
They gratefully took him into the boat and soon after they reached land.

John 6:1-21

[1] After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiber'i-as.

[2] And a multitude followed him, because they saw the signs which he did on those who were diseased.

[3] Jesus went up on the mountain, and there sat down with his disciples.

[4] Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand.

[5] Lifting up his eyes, then, and seeing that a multitude was coming to him, Jesus said to Philip, "How are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?"

[6] This he said to test him, for he himself knew what he would do.

[7] Philip answered him, "Two hundred denarii would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little."

[8] One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him,

[9] "There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two fish; but what are they among so many?"

[10] Jesus said, "Make the people sit down." Now there was much grass in the place; so the men sat down, in number about five thousand.

[11] Jesus then took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted.

[12] And when they had eaten their fill, he told his disciples, "Gather up the fragments left over, that nothing may be lost."

[13] So they gathered them up and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten.

[14] When the people saw the sign which he had done, they said, "This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world!"

[15] Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself.

[16] When evening came, his disciples went down to the sea,

[17] got into a boat, and started across the sea to Caper'na-um. It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them.

[18] The sea rose because a strong wind was blowing.

[19] When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and drawing near to the boat. They were frightened,

[20] but he said to them, "It is I; do not be afraid."

[21] Then they were glad to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat was at the land to which they were going.