

St. Andrew's Episcopal Church
The Last Sunday after Pentecost
Christ the King Sunday
November 20, 2016
The Rev. Grayce O'Neill Rowe

I imagine that you have heard it said that we need to be careful of what we pray for. This is really good advice because sometimes the answers to our prayers take us to places where we never expected to go. Sometimes the answers to our prayers have us doing things that we never thought we would do. Yes, indeed, we do need to be careful of what we pray for.

I want to add to that another piece of advice. Today I want to say that in addition to being careful of what we pray for we also need to be careful of what we sing.

At the end of our service today we will sing the familiar hymn, a hymn that we sang just a few short months ago, at the end of our service we will sing Hymn #494 – Crown him with many crowns. A most appropriate hymn for this Sunday which is known as Christ the King Sunday. Crown him with many crowns is a powerful hymn. And it is a dangerous hymn. It is a hymn that might lead us to places we never expected to go. It is a hymn that might lead us to doing things that we never thought we would do.

Just think about these words that we will sing: “Crown him with many crowns, the Lamb upon his throne; Hark! How the heavenly anthem drowns all music but its own; awake, my soul, and sing of him who died for thee, and hail him as thy matchless King through all eternity.”

I expect that you have sung this hymn many times. But I wonder if you have ever asked yourselves this question? I wonder if you have ever asked just who it is that is doing the crowning in this hymn? Who is the one who is saying – crown him with many crowns?

I usually sing this hymn without thinking much about the words but this week I did think about the words, and when I reread the words of the hymn, when I paid close attention to the words it became obvious to me that the simple answer to my question of who is doing the crowning, the simple answer is that we are. We are the ones who are crowning Jesus with many

crowns. You and I are the ones whose souls are singing crown him with many crowns; we are hailing him as our matchless king through all eternity.

And that is why I suggest today that we need to be careful of what we sing. Of course, you might say, well, we are Christians after all. It is a no brainer that Jesus would be our king. But let's be careful now. Making Jesus king over our lives means that we are acknowledging that he does what kings do. If Jesus is our king, then Jesus is the one who is the ruler of our lives. Making Jesus king over our lives means that as living members of his kingdom we are subject to his rules, we are subject to his authority.

Now I don't know about you, but if I'm going to be subject to his authority, then that means that I need to take a close look at just what his authority is. What does Jesus' authority over us mean?

Let's begin with the reason that Christ the King Sunday was added to the Christian calendar in the first place. It is a rather recent addition – added after the First World War. Former Presiding Bishop Edmond Browning, in his book "A Year of Days" states that Christ the King Sunday "was intended to be a feast day of earnest prayer for peace among all nations under the kingship of Christ." He continues "Human sinfulness has so often expressed its shameful self in the hatred of nation for nation, and this has so often been acted out by kings at war with kings. Yet this king, who rejected the power of earthly kingship, this king, Jesus, this king will bury those hatreds forever in the graceful government of love."

I love this - the graceful government of love. Jesus' authority over us calls us to live in a graceful government of love. Jesus' authority over us calls us to love our enemies. Our culture tells us that in order to live in peace, sometimes we have to go to war. If we make Christ our king, can we find new ways to live in peace? Can we find peace without first going to war? If we crown Jesus as our king, this means that we have to look in new ways at our relationships with other nations, with other religions, with other people? Can we call Jesus our king and at the same time hate those who hate us? If Jesus is our king, how then do we respect the dignity of every human being? These are hard questions. These are questions that cause division. And yet, these are the questions that we must ask if we really mean it when we sing, Crown him with many crowns.

If we make Jesus our king, then living under his authority means that we cannot rest until God's justice reigns on earth. Living under Jesus' authority means that we cannot rest until every single person on earth has enough food to eat; every single person has adequate shelter, clothing, and warmth. This means that we have to share generously, even when we are not certain that we have enough. Making Jesus our king is dangerous – it is life changing – we might even find ourselves in places doing things that we never expected.

If we live under the authority of Jesus our king, then as his subjects, we are also to forgive as he forgives. Can we really forgive that way? Can we forgive the way that Jesus forgives when we remember that Jesus forgave even as he was dying on the cross? Can we die to our pride, can we let go of our pain, can we forgive? Can we forgive even those who have caused us great injury? Can we forgive the terrorists?

Making Jesus our king is dangerous – it is life changing. Making Jesus our king will take us to places we never expected to go. Making Jesus our king will have us doing things we never thought we would or could do. Making Jesus our king, crowning Christ as our king, means that we will become citizens of a graceful government of love.

And so there is one more thing that we need to remember if we make Jesus our king. When we live in this graceful government of love, when we live in a kingdom where we are called to love others, that is not all. Loving others is certainly an essential part of Jesus' kingdom, an essential part of a government of love. But, if Jesus is our king, if Jesus is our king of love, then it means that Jesus loves us as well.

And so even when we struggle with just how it is that we will live in obedience to our king, we are loved. Even as we find ourselves in places we did not expect to go, as we find ourselves doing things that we never expected to do, we are loved. Even as we fail to forgive, or as we become distracted from our calling to work for justice, and at those times when we fill ourselves with plenty and forget about those who are hungry, at all of these times we are loved.

Our king, this king of love, calls us to obedience, he calls us to work for justice, for peace, he calls us to share our abundance. And when we fall short of what he expects of us, he loves us anyway. What an incredible king.

And so, I don't know about you, but for me, even if it is dangerous, even if I might wind up where I least expected to go doing what I least expected to do, even so I am going to spend all of my days joyfully singing: Crown him the Lord of heaven, enthroned in worlds above; crown him the King, to whom is given, the wondrous name of Love. Crown him with many crowns, as thrones before him fall, crown him, ye kings, with many crowns, for he is King of all."

I hope and pray that you will too.