

Sermon Notes – November 24, 2024
Christ the King Sunday
The Holy Gospel of St. John 18: 33-37
Peace Lutheran Church
“The King. The Anointed One!”

The biblical tradition preserves widely divergent judgments concerning political institutions and God's relationship to them. When Israel's tribal leaders, fed up with the chaos and anarchy rampant in the era of “judges,” ask Samuel to appoint a king to bring peace and order, God tells Samuel this is the worst idea ever (1 Samuel 8). If rejection of God's rule, then kings inevitably become self-serving oppressors. Nevertheless, God instructs Samuel to do as the people ask. Samuel anoints Saul, first of “the Lord's anointed” (1 Sam. 24: 6; see also 2 Samuel 23: 1). A generation later, God declares dynastic monarchy the greatest idea since creation itself, and likewise promises David's offspring eternal sovereignty over His people (2 Samuel 7). Moreover, God's anointed king will be the Son of God.

Clearly the prophetic tradition later associated with Deuteronomistic theology considered kings at best a necessary evil, while Jerusalem's dynastic theologians saw kings and Solomon's great temple as divinely ordained and primary signs of God's covenant faithfulness. All this worked, if fitfully, for four centuries. Then Babylonians seized the land, razed the temple, and ended David's dynasty by forcing the last king to watch as they slaughtered his sons, then gouging out the king's eyes and leading him off to exile (2 Kings 25).

The Deuteronomistic history (2 Kings 23: 26-27) blamed the whole debacle on King Manasseh's unfaithfulness, but that did not keep David and his many transgressions from being remembered in death as God's own right hand and the Spirit's oracle (2 Sam. 23: 1-7). Nor did this failure of all covenant promises kill the dreams of another, or put our people back on top where we belong - forever (Dan. 7: 9-14 and countless analog).

Each gospel has its own way of proclaiming the crucified Jesus, cruelly crowned, stripped of royal robes, and enthroned on a cross with the title “King of the Jews” above his head as the Lord's Messiah and the Son of God. John's coronation scene is perhaps the most dramatic. Jesus

prophesies that he will actively give his life away (10: 17-18), will be “lifted up” in death, and in so doing “will draw all people to [him]self” (12: 31-33). He dictates every ensuing action. He orders Judas to commence His betrayal (13: 27), takes over the arrest scene (18: 1-11), puts his prosecutors on trial (18: 19-23), and then orders Pilate to declare Him king (18: 37), which Pilate does! (19: 14). John's gospel mocks Rome, the persecutors of Jesus' followers. They mistakenly think they rule the world. In truth, Jesus, who lays down His life for His friends, rules the world through love and sacrifice - and always will!