

Rev. Diane Jamison Fitch  
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2 Samuel 23:1-7  
Revelations 1:4b-8

Abington Presbyterian Church

### Alpha & Omega

Today is Christ the King Sunday. The day we focus on the kingship of Christ. Several years ago, when I was living in New York, our high school youth lead a worship service focused on images of God or Jesus. We had spent time looking at lots of passages of the Bible that portrayed the different attributes or metaphors of our faith. I asked them to select an image, and then to share what made that image meaningful to them. These became our meditations for the morning. They chose hands, a heart, a rock, a shepherd and a dove, as well as a few others I have since forgotten. But no one chose the image of King. No one. So what about you? What image comes to mind for you when you think of God or Jesus?

My guess is, the image of Christ as King is likely not the first thing that comes to mind for you either. Most of us here have very little experience with any earthly King. And in this day and age, we have come to think of the idea of kings and queens as antiquated or oppressive, or something in the movies or fairy tales of long ago. But in some ways, we are missing the point. For Christ's kingship is nothing at all like that of earthly kings. Jesus is a King of *humility and service*. Jesus said:

You know that those who are recognized as rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones make their authority over them felt. But it shall not be so among you. Rather, whoever wishes to become great among you will be your servant; whoever wishes to be first among you will be the slave of all. For the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:42-45, NAB).

Jesus knew the oppressive nature of secular kings, and in contrast to them, he connected his role as king to humble service, and commanded his followers to be servants as well. His teachings spell out a kingdom of justice and judgment balanced with radical love, mercy, peace, and forgiveness. When we celebrate Christ as King, we are not celebrating an oppressive ruler, but one willing to die for humanity and whose "loving-kindness endures forever." From alpha to omega – beginning to end – A to Z.

This is the sort of King I would like to follow! But what about those other images we have of Jesus and God? Jesus as shepherd? God as rock? The Spirit as a dove? God as parent, or wind or loving hands? How do they fit into us following Christ as King?

The image of Christ as King is only one of many of the ways we as humans have tried to connect with the vast, complex and powerful presence of God. Theologians have long debated Jesus's true mission, that of apocalyptic prophet, sage teacher of wisdom, or sacrificial lamb. But the wide variety of images and stories of Jesus all seem to point to one reality: Jesus is someone who is "beyond all description while at the same time being the embodiment of that for which the deepest human yearnings strive." And he is called by

many different names: Messiah, Christ, King of Kings, Lord of Lords, true God of true God, and often Son of God.

One thing most New Testament scholars agree on is that Jesus' main aim was the kingdom of God – not a distant and future place or event, but a statement about living under God's rule and rules here and now.

How do we live, day to day, following Christ our King? It may be that we are guided by different images at different times.

When we are vulnerable or grieving, we may need our King to offer us care and compassion.

When we are stubborn or jealous, we may need our King to guide us in a new direction. When we are proud or selfish, we may need our King to help us see how our actions or words hurt others.

When we are feeling lost or anxious, we may need our King to show us the way.

But in all cases, we need to be ready and willing to follow Christ our King.

Glennon Doyle, in her memoir, Love Warrior, shares a story of a very difficult time in her youth. She was brought up Catholic, and was struggling with an alcohol addiction and anguish over an abortion. Her parents finally suggested she turn to the church after countless other efforts. Glennon found solace and comfort and sanctuary there. Listen to some of what she writes:

"I feel enveloped, as if I have stepped out of my life and into somewhere better ... I look up and see that I am standing beneath a huge painting of Mary holding her baby. I look at Mary and she looks at me. My heart does not leap, it swells and beats steadily, insistently ... Mary is not what people think she is. She loves me, I know it. She has been waiting for me. She is my mother. ... I sit in front of her and I want to stay here forever ... with Mary and her baby around this campfire of candle prayers. I do not know if I believe in Mary, but I believe in her right now. She is real. She is what I needed. ... My parents sent me to the right place."

There may be times in our life when things are so difficult, or when doubt just creeps in, that we can't connect to any one of these images. We may be too tired, too scared, too lonely, too depressed ... whatever the reason, we lose our way to who Jesus or God can be for us in the time and space we're in.

It is then we need the reminder – from our church, our family, our friends, our pastor – Jesus and God are STILL all those things! Still parent, shepherd, rock, hands, and king! The challenge for us as a faith community is to be the reminder for one another, to catch one another, to prod one another, to support one another.

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I want to share with you a recent post from the blog of a colleague from my years in ministry in New York. Rev. Paul Alcorn recently retired after many years in ministry, and he is finding his way as he attends worship. He writes:

We went to church again last Sunday.  
It was nice.  
The people around us were welcoming.  
The pastor was honest and thoughtful with what she said.  
In a variety of different ways we were reminded of the communities around us.  
From those down the street to those across the world.  
But, what I left with was this.  
For one hour  
Out of the 168 hours in my week  
I was reminded of goodness.

And, compassion.  
And, gratitude.  
And, grace.  
Those words were said out loud.  
Both to me and for me.  
And, more than that, I said those words out loud.  
To me and for me.  
And also to and for you.  
I was reminded of the larger circles around my life.  
And, that we are made for each other.  
And, are to care for each other.  
And, that I am not (and neither are you) the center of that circle.  
I was also reminded I was not perfect.  
(Something I already know all too well.)  
But in the next breath,  
I was reminded that, even though I am far from perfect,  
I am valued.  
And valuable.  
And, have the ability and the opportunity  
In the moment before me  
To make myself better.  
And the world around me better.  
All of that in one hour.  
Only one hour.  
Out of the 168 hours in my week.  
In the other 167 hours of my week  
Between the news  
And the social media posts  
And the grocery store checkout lines  
I am reminded how petty we can be.  
And, how thoughtless and uncaring we can be.  
And, how inhuman we, too often, are.  
For 167 hours each week we are bombarded by the reminders of our worst selves.  
But for that one hour....  
We dare not forget the horror and the heartbreak with which so many people live.  
But, we should not forget the goodness either.  
In ourselves.  
And, in each other.  
I, for one, need the reminder.

In that one hour a week I get to pause, to receive encouragement, to know I am loved just the way I am, to express gratitude for what I have and to send loving prayers in all directions for those who are hurting. It is an hour of sanity in a seemingly insane world full of political chaos, social injustice and unanticipated natural catastrophes. In this hour I remind myself of the dream of God and my role in helping it to become a reality moment by moment. I leave believing that we can do better and that we are not alone.

We gather this day to worship Jesus - our king. "The One who demonstrated power through weakness, who manifested strength through vulnerability, who established justice through mercy, and who built the kingdom of God by embracing a confused, chaotic, and violent world, taking its pain into his own body, dying the death it sought, and rising again to

remind us that light is stronger than darkness, love is stronger than hate, and that with God, all things are possible.”

This is the gospel we proclaim, the king we gather to worship. May it be so! Amen.