

Bring your refuge to those in danger, bring your peace for those in war, bring your presence to those forgotten by this world, O God, +F, +S, and +HS. *Amen.*

‘The people stood by, watching Jesus on the cross; but the leaders scoffed at him, saying, "He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!" The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine, and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!" There was also an inscription over him, "This is the King of the Jews.'" [Luke 23.35-38]

*For Christ and His Kingdom or The Website for Kingdom of God Citizenship Didn't Crash on Election Night or That Stained Glass Depiction of Jesus the King Right Behind Me is Yuuuuuuge!*

I'm going to tell you a story. Once there was a man who really loved his country, but believed it was falling into political and religious decay. He was certain his country could be great again, but he was the only one who could fix it. And the best way to fix it was to gather up every person who thought differently than he did and kick them out. He also believed if other countries disagreed with his beliefs, they should be invaded and their governments should be overthrown as well. Any guesses? It's Ulrich Zwingli, the 16th Century Protestant Reformer.

Zwingli grew up a devout Catholic--there was no other Church in the West at the time--on a modest farm in a valley between the Swiss Alps. His parents recognized early on he was bright and sent him away to university where he studied to be a priest. But during his studies, he began to question the Church's authority due to its corruption. He soon found he was not alone. About 15 years

after his ordination, Martin Luther began what is now known as the Protestant Reformation, and Zwingli was instantly hooked. He moved to Zurich and quickly gained followers as he preached the values of the Reformation--Scripture alone, faith alone, grace alone--but not everyone was convinced Protestantism was right, and hostilities in Zurich between Roman Catholics and Protestants [Lutherans and Anabaptists] quickly became violent. In the 16th Century, conversion was not a private, individual experience, but was public and corporate, it was a choice between patriotism and treason, and Zwingli demanded one converted to his form of Christianity or he/she was either banished or killed. Zwingli removed all of Zurich's leadership and placed himself in charge, because he believed he was called to build up the Kingdom of God with Jesus Christ as Zurich's king. He then began to spread his faith to other cities in Switzerland through military conquest so that his country could finally be under God's rule. But things didn't end well for Zwingli. He was soon killed in battle, never having realized his theo-political vision. Catholics and Protestants alike called him a heretic, murderer, traitor, and anarchist. Church historians, theologians, and political theorists, to this day, still debate whether Zwingli was sincere in his attempt to create a unified kingdom under God, or he was a man lost under the spell of his own power.

While we could easily draw a few parallels between Zwingli's time and ours, the situation in 16th Century Switzerland appears quite different from Luke's Gospel. In today's crucifixion narrative, we find Jesus has been betrayed by one of his disciples, abandoned by the rest, and heckled by everyone else as he is executed by the Roman Empire and with the blessings of the Jewish religious leadership. Jesus is crucified--a particularly humiliating, painful, and unclean way to die--as a political insurrectionist along with two criminals. The Roman powers-that-be craft a sign for Jesus declaring him a 'king,' but Jesus could hardly be seen as any real political threat to the strongest empire in the world. In response to Jesus suffering, instead of feeling compassion, the soldiers offered him sour wine to ridicule his pain. Both Jews and Romans dare Jesus to use his messianic superpowers to free himself and usher in God's Kingdom. And, surprisingly, Jesus responds, not with anger, not with bitterness, not with self-pity, but with empathy to the people mocking him, as well as empathy for the criminals who share his punishment.

We all know the the details of the passion narrative very well. It is a central part of how we understand the Christian faith. Yet because it is so familiar it makes it easier for us to overlook the rich dimensions of the text. As we reflect on Luke's Gospel during the Feast of Christ the King, it is important for us to ask: as members of the Jesus Movement, what does Luke's passion story tell us about the

Kingship of Jesus? What does it tell us about the Kingdom of God? And perhaps most importantly, what does Luke tell us about our participation in Jesus' Kingdom?

Jesus the Christ is our King, but as a radically different leader than human history has ever known. As Americans, we live in an odd political environment which simultaneously claims to give no preference to any one particular religion as it idealizes Christian language, symbols, and values. Numerous politicians, especially those vying for the country's highest office, often say they model their public life after Jesus Christ. That is, they make leadership decisions based on 'what Jesus would do.' This is not limited to one particular political party or candidate. What every person who attests to this never seems to understand is how much their politics influences their religious arguments instead of his/her respective religious values influencing his/her politics. In other words, our government officials won't admit the 21st Century, Capitalist American Empire and its 'gospel' of winner-takes-all influences how they answer the question 'What would Jesus do?' In mixing faith and politics in this way, then, it becomes easy to justify greed, hatred, and violence in a system many people in this country view as broken. 'Well, Jesus didn't really plan to revolt against governments. The Kingdom of God is only a spiritual kingdom. God put our political leaders in

power to protect us people of faith, so they are justified to use force against our enemies. This goes for the evil-doers both in our country and outside our country.’ Or so the argument goes.

Today is the Feast of Christ the King. Since it is the last Sunday of the long Pentecost season, it often falls into obscurity. Yet it highlights a profound aspect of our faith. The liturgical year is not linear, it is cyclical, and Christ the King bridges the two worlds of Pentecost and Advent. Pentecost is the season in which we reflect on the realities of the Kingdom of God we practice every day as the Church in the world. Advent is the time in which we celebrate Jesus, our King, beginning his sovereignty in the incarnation and who will one day return to complete the promises of his Kingdom.

There is another reason why our 21st Century minds are ambivalent about today’s feast: we’re really uncomfortable with the kingship model. I mean, we are Americans, right? Our government’s founding was based on an allergic reaction to kings. Royalty doesn’t really do anything for us these days either, except maybe when we watch the stunningly chiseled Matt Smith in the Netflix series, *the Crown*, or delight in the terminal cuteness of Colin Firth in the film, *the King’s Speech*. But if we know anything about Scripture, we know part of the power of the Gospels is the way in which they are able to take images from everyday life,

flip them upside-down, and reinterpret them. We should affirm the Kingship of Christ because it is completely different from any other possible political leadership humanity could ever create.

We are given an excellent description of Jesus Christ as King right here in Luke's crucifixion narrative. Jesus Christ is not a political leader who is separated from his people. He suffers along with everyone, especially those, such as criminals, who have been cast aside, mistreated, and abused by society, economy, and government. Nor does Jesus separate himself from people who mock him, chastise him, or take him for granted. He does not get angry. He does not ignore them. He forgives them. And he remains present [If only our leaders would manifest any one of these qualities.]. In Jesus' desire to truly be with all people, it may seem as if Jesus is powerless, but we know what happens after the crucifixion. We know Jesus Christ is in control through his suffering and death, and we know this means the power and finality of all suffering and death has been destroyed forever. This is the promise of Jesus our King.

And Jesus Christ rules a Kingdom but a radically different kingdom than this world has ever known. Here's another story. Many of the first people who came to this country did so for religious freedom. These 'Puritans' believed if they came here and established a Christian country they would institute the Kingdom of God

in this world. They thought if they created a society in which Jesus Christ is King, it would stand as an example, or as the Puritan governor of Massachusetts, John Winthrop, said, it would be seen as ‘a beacon on a hill’ which would incite all of Europe to adopt their political structure and religious values. But like good Calvinists, the Puritans believed sinful people needed law and order so they set up a homogeneous system, no different than the government they escaped, which protected their vision of a Christian community. For sure, our nation has evolved for the better in numerous issues regarding religion, race, gender, and orientation. That said, while many Americans truly believe we are one nation under the Christian God, they hold many views regarding state-sponsored violence, xenophobia, LGBTQ-phobia, and chauvinism, which would be difficult to argue are consistent with the Kingdom of God as a community of love, inclusivity, gentleness, and peace.

Again, Luke’s Gospel provides a better understand of how the politics of God’s Kingdom operates. In Jesus’ submission to his death, he both affirms the cross and simultaneously denies the cross. He affirms the crucifixion as the apt punishment for him since Jesus was providing an alternative political structure directly challenging the government of the Roman Empire. But in his submission to the crucifixion, Jesus also affirmed that violence has no use or power in God’s

Kingdom. The messiah does not answer violence with violence. For Jesus, the faithful life is always non-violence because God is non-violent. Jesus willfully accepted his execution so every person who experiences suffering will know Jesus is with them in their pain and is welcome in God's Kingdom.

So, what does all of this mean for us Jesus People living in America post Election 2016? What are we to do? We are called by the Holy Spirit to be Jesus Christ's subjects in the Kingdom of God, but in a way radically different from any other national or ethnic identity. Our culture is saturated with a 'civic religion' in which we confuse political symbols and values with religious symbols and values. It has become profane to have any expression which tarnishes the American flag either symbolically or literally. It is heresy to doubt any military action the United States takes in the world no matter how questionable out of respect for the sacrifices of our Armed Forces. In order to decide our rule of law, we need to go back to the 'original intent' of the Framers of the Constitution because it is America's sacred document. Since so many people take these beliefs as truth, it is no doubt many people confuse their faith in God with their pride in country. However real and sincere these beliefs are, they have the potential for dangerous words and deeds. If we convolute any of our government actions with God's providence, it becomes way too easy to marginalize others outside the white, male

majority, whether they are Native American, LGBTQ, African-American, female, or Muslim. It's become acceptable to say and do destructive things in our political culture because it is driven, almost exclusively, by fear. This is true regardless of political affiliation, left or right. But, as followers of Jesus, we operate under a different covenant: a love for God and a love for all people.

There are many people in our country who believe God's will was done in last week's election. But if the pollsters are right, there are just as many who believe the opposite is true. What, then, do we do? How can we move forward among such division? While there are no easy answers of what to do as politically aware Americans, we have a clear mission as active followers of Jesus. At the point of death, Jesus Christ--faced with political vitriol, hate speech, total abandonment, gratuitous torture--Jesus responded with unconditional love and unsolicited forgiveness. That is our task. We do this frequently in our common prayer, in our fellowship together, and in our community outreach. Grace Church isn't perfect, but we do a great job making Christ's love concrete to one another and to the world. No matter what happens over the next few years, we can be certain no political fad, no matter how hateful, no matter how fearful, no matter how intolerant can ever take away what we do or who we are in this loving community of Woodlawn. God will continue to call us to God's people to do

God's work. We know this because Jesus Christ is our King, his eternal Kingdom begins now, through us, and it will leave no one behind.

Nathaniel Darville

Christ the King, 2016