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St. James', Mt. Airy
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Christ the King/Reign of Christ
2 Samuel 23:1-7
Revelation 1:4b-8
John 18:33-37

**Gracious God, take our minds and think through them;
take our hands and work through them;
take our hearts and set them on fire.
Amen.**

Wonderful Counselor, The Word, Prince of Peace, The Good Shepherd.

What are some other names for Jesus Christ?

[Firstborn of all Creation, Holy One, Judge, , Light of the World, Son of God, Son of Man, Alpha and Omega, Emmanuel, Lord, Bread of Life, Rock, Lamb of God, Rock, Savior, True Vine, Almighty, King of Kings, Anointed One, Beloved, Healer, Holy, Messiah, Living Water, Redeemer, Teacher, The Way.]

The origins of these names span not just centuries, but millennia, capturing the multitude of ways the people of God have understood who God is, and what God does.

Each of these names show us something not only about who Jesus is, but about how we are in relationship with the divine.

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Today we celebrate the feast of Christ the King.

This is a relative newcomer to our liturgical calendar. It was first instituted by Pope Pius XI in 1925 under the auspicious title the Solemnity of our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe, and was a response to growing nationalism and secularism. In 1970 it was moved to the last Sunday in Ordinary Time and adopted by Anglicans, Lutherans, and other Protestants along with the Revised Common Lectionary.

Christ as king, then, is one of many ways we know something about God. As a symbol it holds power. While we don't have the experience of living under the rule of a monarchy, we know enough about it to understand the power and authority such a title holds.

We know from history that it can mean unassailable power, that might-make-right, that its leadership is passed down through family – unless someone else wins it in battle. There is a long history of using divine right and being chosen by God to establish and maintain rule.

This is not just an invention of the Middle Ages, we see it clearly in our faith stories – from the anointing of David by Samuel and the power plays with David's family for who will succeed him on the throne – to the way in which Matthew explicitly ties the birth of Jesus to the line of David, and how Luke builds up the divine plan for Jesus with the interweaving of Zechariah and Elizabeth's miraculous baby, Zechariah's prophesy, the visit to Mary from the Angel Gabriel, and the Spirit moving between Elizabeth and Mary when they meet.

Mark and John don't have birth narratives for Jesus – but other early writers and shapers of the Jesus story included those stories because they helped to establish something important to them about how they knew Jesus.

In today's Gospel reading from John we get his take on Jesus' kingly identity, not at his birth, but shortly before his death.

When asked by Pilate if he was 'King of the Jews,' Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world."

What he didn't say was 'My kingdom is not **in** this world.'

A small nuance, but one that I think makes all the difference for us as followers of Christ.

Jesus' power not being **of** this world points to the source as God, not a power given or taken away by earthly whims. But Jesus' power was and is **in** this world.

It is **in** the world when we embrace hope over fear, love over hate, abundance over scarcity.

It is **in** the world when we enact the Great Commandment and truly love God with all our heart, all our soul, all our mind, and all our strength – and love our neighbors as ourselves.

It is **in** the world when our hands and hearts do the work of the Baptismal Covenant: seeking and serving Christ in all persons and striving for justice and peace among all people, respecting the dignity of every human being.

This is where I find useful the lens of the Reign of God.

As I wrote about briefly in last week's Thursday news, for many years now some folk have shifted an understanding of this feast day away from Jesus' kingship and toward his reign – away from trying to fit him into earthly models of power and into an understanding of what the world looks like under the reign of God (literally, *thy kingdom come*).

I don't necessarily see these as an either/or. Just as we have a multitude of names for Jesus that each show us a piece of identity, these two threads of Jesus' power can help us understand in different ways.

Jesus' kingship can offer a sense of ultimate power residing beyond the influence of humanity. Just as calling Jesus Master was subversively powerful for slaves in the United States. It was a claim that there was a spiritual power greater than those earthly masters who held power over all aspects of their bodies.

The reign of God holds hope of a different texture.

When I look at a world broken open by hate and war, the idea of the reign of God coming – and bringing the fullness of God's justice, compassion, and reconciliation – it catches my heart and points me toward the expectation and hope we embrace in the season of Advent that begins next Sunday.

Advent is a season when we look to the coming of Christ – both the incarnation with the birth of a baby, and the second coming when God's reign is complete. It is a season of both hope and preparation.

And so as we stand in the doorway between one church year ending and another beginning – between Christ as king and Christ coming, I offer this prayer reflection from Pastor Steve Garnaas-Holmes which has been food for thought for me these last few days.

Dearly Beloved,

Grace and Peace to you.

*Renounce the hope
that in the Second Coming
Christ will act more like Caesar
than Jesus of Nazareth.*

*God meant it the first time,
and it will be no different.*

The cross is not God's B game.

*God comes among us
not conquering but asking for love.*

Christ lures us away from supremacy.

*Christ is an outcast,
whomever we reject or despise
("so marred was his appearance")
to heal us of our resistance to love.*

Christ is homeless, a refugee, a migrant.

Christ is black, queer, alien.

*The only barrier between us and heaven
is the limit of our love.*

*God comes as the Other
and asks us to love
and the Kingdom comes no sooner
than we see her and love her.*

*The Second Coming
has come a million times
and we keep missing it.¹*

My prayer for us on this feast of Christ the King is that we pay attention, that we pray, and that while we are in the world we always remember that in Christ we are not of this world – and we act like it.

~ AMEN ~

¹ <http://unfoldinglight.net/> ; November 20, 2015.