

St. David's Presbyterian Church
St. John's, NL
"Royal Relationship"
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Christ the King Sunday

When you say "the King," who comes to mind first? Many in our culture would identify Elvis in this role. In fact, there is a church in Southern Ontario that has a clergyman who does Elvis impersonations. I even remember a cartoon that pictured people exiting the worship service at the end of the service, where the Minister was shaking hands. Above their heads was a sign that said "Elvis Sunday at First Presbyterian Church." The Minister was wearing the Elvis style hair cut and his '70s white body suit with large sun glasses. Most of the people in line to shake the Minister's hand were also dressed like Elvis in the various eras of his style. The man shaking the Minister's hand said to him, "Thank you, pastor, for that sermon, I'm all shook up." To which the Minister replied, "Thank you, thank you very much."

Well you know there is only one King and Head of the Church, and it's not Elvis and certainly not me. It's the Lord Jesus Christ. You know this, but how well do you know this?

Personal relationship to royalty is not something we give much thought. If we had a close relationship with the Queen of England, perhaps we would begin to get a few more insights into what the reality of being related to the King of Kings truly is like. We would see her residences, her resources, her aides, servants and advisors. We would see her riches, and her riches. Still it would only be a hint of the royalty of the One who gave up everything to come and be one of us, and to die for us to have relationship with God.

The Scriptures give us several metaphors for the Lord in relationship to us. One of them is in Ezekiel 34 where God Himself is the shepherd and God provides David as a kind of under-shepherd and we are the sheep. Here he hearkens back to a time when the shepherd boy who became king will come again to give the people everything they need. He then extends the metaphor by giving details emphasizing the safest environment possible for sheep to live the best life they can live. As the good shepherd, he will provide lots of food, clean water, protection against dangers, threats and enemies, a place of peace, a place to thrive.

This same metaphor is continued in Psalm 100. Here the Psalmist reminds us that the shepherd, who is God, made us his sheep. We are his. He is ours. He encourages us to be thankful for all that we do have. He encourages us to remember God is good, and every time we enter into a place dedicated to worshipping Him, we should come in thankfully, for our relationship with God. We are encouraged to sing of this relationship. Creation is called upon to make a joyful noise to God. Everyone is called to worship.

Paul makes this even more specific. In his prayer for the Ephesians in chapter 1, verse 15 and following, we find him praying not only for those who live in Ephesus but for the whole church, including us. Here we hear Paul praying that we might be given wisdom and revelation, two things we each need desperately. Wisdom to see the reality God sees, and revelation to be told what we cannot know otherwise, all in the context of a vital and living relationship to Jesus Christ. As we get to know Jesus better, he gives us: vision to see, glasses that clearly show us hope, where we currently might only see despair. He also gives us a taste of his transforming power in our individual lives, but also in our communities. God makes the difference in empowering us to love creatively, care so much more, and make a practical difference in our workplaces, in our homes, in our schools, and wherever we go.

Finally in the Matthew 25 Gospel reading, we hear the details of what this looks like. This involves giving drink to the thirsty, both practically and spiritually. This involves giving food to the hungry, both practically and spiritually. This involves clothing those who don't have enough on to stay warm. This is partly why we are looking for hats and mitts and scarves and winter clothes to give away. This also involves visiting in the hospitals and in the prison. These were places in Jesus' day where those who were sick and those in jail, had nothing except for what visitors brought them. Today in North America, patients and inmates both have plenty of the basic water, food and clothes, although debate the food side of institutions. Nevertheless, we are encouraged to visit and love these patients and inmates, thus continuing these ministries.

But the really surprising thing about what the Lord said about the sheep and the goats was that everyone involved was surprised. Both those under condemnation and those under commendation were surprised they were helping or neglecting the Lord. Why? Because some were in relationship

with the king and some were not. Some were going about their life work loving others and didn't know that the Lord was receiving it as if He Himself were the patient or the prisoner.

Others were going about their life work, neglecting others in need and didn't know that the Lord was being neglected as if He Himself were the neglected patient or prisoner. This is why I so often talk about relationship to Jesus in my sermons. It is the key to understanding the Gospels, the key to understanding Christianity. Without this key, the Christian faith remains just another religion that people do, and someday they will be surprised when the Lord talks to them and tells them He doesn't know them. Christianity is first and foremost about knowing Him. And out of that relationship comes the wonderful social action, concern for the poor and needy, and transforming power that changes lives for the better.

It is possible to be in the royal court, to serve and do all kinds of things for the monarch, yet never know them. As it is possible to be in the church all your life, and never know the One who knows you so well, and loves you so wonderfully. So the first order of business today and everyday, is this relationship, and where you are, and where I am in this relationship.

Receive the royal summons today. Come close to the One who is on the royal throne. Let him put his arms around you, and tell you afresh that you are his royal child, loved, valued, important. Tell him how much you love him. Tell him what is on your heart. Tell him all those things that might be hindering you from a new and transformed relationship.

Let this new season of Advent and Christmas coming be one truly related to the person for whom the season is dedicated. Let some of the other things about the season go. Cling to the one for whom the season is named.

Let us pray.