

WHAT DO WE OWE A KING?

Pledge Ingathering Sunday

I was delighted last year to attend my first St. John's *Christmas Show* just 6 weeks before I officially began as your new Rector. It was a wonderful performance but the part that really knocked my socks off was at the end. The narrator concluded, "*thus unto us a child is born,*" (quoting both Isaiah 9:6 and Handel's Messiah) "*unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called...*" at that point the choir broke into a chorus from Handel's Messiah... "*and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.*" The three kings then moved seamlessly back into a position before the Christ child and took on the solo roles in the Alleluia Chorus. *Hallelujah! For the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. The Kingdom of this world has become the kingdom of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever. King of Kings, and Lord of Lords, Hallelujah!* I got so excited! That's who that little baby is, our King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Those two choruses appropriately sum up the theme of this Sunday, the *Feast of Christ the King*.

The Feast of Christ the King stands at the conclusion of the Church Year, confessing now that all the other feasts and celebrations we have kept throughout the year have been signs in our midst that Jesus Christ rules, that Jesus was born, manifested, killed, raised from the dead, ascended, and will come again... to be King of all; that Jesus our King reigns. The Feast of Christ the King sums up the Church Year with the proclamation that Jesus Christ is King. *And he shall reign for ever and ever!*

Today is also our *pledge ingathering Sunday*, when we are asked to show our *loyalty* to God and to this parish Church of believers gathered in His name, through our financial pledge for the coming year.

So, what do we owe a King? Throughout the ages, under thousands of monarchies, the answer to that question has always been the same... *As little as possible*. I will owe *more than I want* and I will pay *as little as I can possibly get away with*. Maybe it's the opulence and prestige, the pomp and circumstance that make it look to us like the king doesn't need our money. It's always been a struggle for kings and rulers of every age to raise money, taxing the poor, making deals and trading favors with the rich and the landed aristocracy. Nobody wants to pay a king any more than they have to.

Aah, but our King is different. Our King doesn't come to us in pomp and circumstance. Our King is born among us as a poor baby boy in a stable because there is no room for Him in the inn. Our King is not set apart from us by royal robes, a grand and magnificent castle, by royal title or by any earthly sign of status or prestige. Our King *who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness* (Philippians 2:7). Our King taught us that greatness in His Kingdom has nothing to do with our status or power or wealth. *You know*, he said to James and John after they asked to sit at his right and left hand when he came into his kingdom,

That among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many. (Mark 10:42-45)

The only crown Jesus wore in this life was a crown of thorns that pierced his brow. The only time He was proclaimed as King was when He hung upon a cross. *The King of the Jews* the sign read mockingly above His head as He died for you and me upon that cross.

What do we owe our King, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ? To answer that question as we might to an earthly king or ruler, *as little as possible*, is to deny that Jesus is our King and to deny His Kingdom. We owe Him nothing less than everything! *I appeal to you brothers and sisters*, Paul wrote to the Romans (12:1)

by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

To our Lord and King who gave up everything and gave us His very life, who loves us and sets us free, who died for us and rose from the dead that we might die with Him and live by the power of that resurrection... to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ we owe everything! We owe Him grateful hearts. We owe Him our thanks and praise for all that we receive at His hands. Is there anything we have which ultimately does not come from God? We owe Him our obedience. We owe Him a debt of love, to love Him with our whole heart, strength, soul and mind. We owe Him the obedience of following His teaching, loving our neighbor as ourselves. Nothing – no amount of money, no great sacrifice, no mighty deed, no great work, no lofty promise – nothing we could give would begin to pay what we owe in allegiance to our King. We owe Him everything.

We have a picture of Jesus as King in our Gospel lesson this morning. At the end of the ages when the *Son of Man*, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, *comes in his glory*. He will sit on His magnificent throne and all the peoples of all the nations will come before Him to be judged. Here is the King in majesty! Here we see His glory, a heavenly glory, and a heavenly throne. But what do we learn of the King in Jesus' story? He was among us all the time and we didn't recognize Him. As we treated the least of them – the hungry, the naked, the stranger, the sick, the one in prison, the homeless – so we treated the King.

We do serve a different kind of King! A King who does not *lord* it over us, but loves and serves us. We serve a King who is not far off and distant, but a King who comes among us and takes our place. We serve a King who identifies with those most in need. We serve Him by serving them! We serve a King who inspires our love and action by His example. We serve a King and live in a Kingdom (the Kingdom of God), which is in this world but not of this world, which is breaking forth even *now*, but is *still to come*.

Today you are invited to make your financial pledge to God through this parish church as a concrete way you can give your allegiance to the King. The parish is a community of the King. This is where we gather to be the King's Kids. Here is where we gather to be in the courts of the King, praising His name, bowing down before Him, recognizing His royalty with awe and wonder as we share in Communion with God and with one another. This is a community where we can teach our children about the King and the values of

His Kingdom. This is the community where we can best live into the life of that Kingdom. And this is a community from which we can reach out to love and help those in need.

I don't mean to equate our parish Church with the Kingdom of God. We fall a long way short! We meet and serve Jesus Christ in many ways and places beyond St. John's Church. And, of course, we are just one among hundreds and thousands of Christian Churches who serve the King, just a tiny part of Christendom. But it is the community where we meet to share in the life and fellowship of Jesus Christ our King. And that is significant. That deserves our loyalty and support.

So, what do we owe our King? Everything! Today we have the opportunity to give back some of what we owe. We can never give back to Jesus our King even a fraction of what He has given us. But he asks us to and we can give Him a significant portion of what we have to do His work, to spread the life of His Kingdom. We serve a different kind of King. The *least we can get away with* may work best for us in earthly kingdoms. But in Christ's Kingdom the more we give the more we receive.

Whatever you give to Christ our King as your financial pledge to the coming year for St. John's Church I invite you to do so with love and praise in your heart. Give a gift to Christ our King. And may your heart be wrapped up in that gift and go with it!

On this great Feast of Christ the King let us give what we owe to our King – the gifts of our grateful hearts. *Hallelujah! For the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. The Kingdom of this world has become the kingdom of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever. King of Kings, and Lord of Lords, Hallelujah!*