

Over the past few months, I have been thinking a great deal about leadership and the personal characteristics we look for and value in good leaders. Leadership is something many of us think about as we look to the future. In fact, as I along with Council members are presently looking for leaders who will be willing to serve within the life of the faith community over the next few years, I realize how important it is for us to understand what leadership means in the life of the church. So, it very interesting that as we come to this last Sunday of the church year, that Sunday when we proclaim the reign of Christ as all in all, we receive scripture readings that force us to really grapple with what meaningful leadership looks like. On this day we are essentially confronted with the question, “What does it mean for us to name Christ as our leader? What can it mean for us to name Christ as our King?”

It is truly difficult for most Americans to understand living under royal rule. After all, our identity as a nation was borne out of the experience of breaking **away** from royal rule and kingship. When we think of a king, we tend to think of a ruler with authoritarian power. When we think of kings and leaders with power, we think of those who oversee the work and bureaucracy of a nation. And we **hope** for a leader who is honest, has

integrity, grants citizens a measure of security and **affirms** the **values** of the majority of the people. We look to leaders who promise a better tomorrow for **all** people. **We** tend to think of kings and rulers as people who hold positions of honor, people who are looked **up** to. When we picture a king, we think of looking **up** to one who has power, to one who has been exalted.

So on this last day of the church year, as we think about leadership, we look to **Christ** as our leader and ask what it means for us to name **Christ** as our king and Lord. Theologian, Robert Capon, in *Hunting the Divine Fox*, presents an interesting assessment of what American popular religion perceives Christ to be like, and I have to say it doesn't look much like Jesus. He writes:

. . . almost nobody resists the temptation to jazz up the humanity of Christ. The true paradigm of the ordinary American view of Jesus is Superman: "Faster than a speeding bullet, more powerful than a locomotive, able to leap tall buildings in a single bound. It's Superman! Strange visitor from another planet, who came to earth with powers and abilities far beyond those of mortal men, and who, disguised as Clark Kent, mild-mannered reporter for a great metropolitan newspaper, fights a never-ending battle for truth, justice and the American Way." If that isn't popular christology, I'll eat my hat. Jesus -- gentle, meek and mild, but with secret, souped-up, more-than-human insides -- bumbles around for thirty-three years, nearly gets himself done in for good by the Kryptonite Kross, but at the last minute, struggles into the phone booth of the Empty Tomb, changes into his Easter suit and, with a single bound, leaps back up

to the planet Heaven. It's got it all -- including, just so you shouldn't miss the lesson, kiddies: *He never once touches Lois Lane.*

You think that's funny? Don't laugh. The human race is, was and probably always will be deeply unwilling to accept a human messiah. We don't want to be saved **in** our humanity; we want to be fished out of it. We crucified Jesus, not because he was God, but because he blasphemed: He claimed to be God and then failed to come up to our standards for assessing the claim. It's not that we weren't looking for the Messiah; it's just that he wasn't what **we** were looking for. Our kind of Messiah [our kind of king] would come **down** from a cross. He would carry a folding phone booth in his back pocket. He wouldn't do a stupid thing like rising from the dead. He would do a smart thing like never dying.

Well, today we **are** given a picture of **Christ** the King, this one we call "Lord." And, in the picture we are given, this King is **not** revealed to us by looking **up**, but by looking **down**. The royal face God reveals to us through the person of Jesus does **not** aspire to the heights of glory, power, wealth or fame. No, to see the kingship revealed in Jesus the Christ, we must look **down** to the lowly life Jesus chose to walk.

So, what can it mean for us to name Christ as our King? On this day, the writer of Luke's gospel gives us an answer as he completely **shatters** our perceptions of what a king or ruler should look like. Our gospel reading is one in which Jesus, **our** King, is being derided, mocked and taunted. Luke gives us the picture of one who has been falsely charged with fomenting rebellion against Rome. He gives us a picture of Jesus on the cross, insulted, mocked and killed. Today, we see Jesus, our King, as one

who hangs there **dying**. And what is revealed in this passage is miserable, deeply moving and shocking. Quite frankly, we would prefer to hide our face rather than watch someone who is truly honorable be tortured, because even our compassion is not able to help this one who hangs there, this one we call “Lord.”

The last moments of Jesus’ life all seem to be in stark contrast to what is valued as great in our world, to what we think kingship and leadership look like. Jesus **did** not and **does** not come in power. In fact, he **refuses** to come in power but instead appears in wretched vulnerability, humility, and love. And, in doing so, he breaks a law, *the law of death*. **He breaks this law by ushering in God’s law of love**. You see, Jesus does not come vowing retribution even on those who crucify him. Instead, he comes as one who is vulnerable and offers forgiveness and suffering love. This Jesus does not come down off the cross to prove that he is a king with power. Instead, he remains on that instrument of torture, humiliated, and representing all who suffer unjustly.

This King we see hanging on a cross **rules** by pouring out redemption, forgiveness, and suffering love upon the entire world. As Jesus hangs on a cross, we see a King who does not lord his greatness over all others, but instead **forgives** enemies and offers redemption to

criminals. And, in Jesus' crucifixion and death, we discover that this leader, this King, is one who is numbered **with** the criminals. This leader is counted as one of the transgressors. This innocent One does **not** hang out with those in power but with the sinners, with the criminals, with the **weak** and the **vulnerable**, living and dying in solidarity with all those the powerful despise. And, as this King is **ruling** from a cross, he calls **us** to **follow his example by serving, forgiving, and loving all those in our lives, loving all those we consider "other."**

So, what does it mean for us to name Christ as our King? Well, for any who call Jesus "Lord," it means we are called to **join** God's "insistent, consistent, and persistent solidarity with the weak, the oppressed, and the forgotten of this world. In short, the church of Jesus Christ reveals itself as faithful to its Lord **only** in so far as it stands with those who are most **vulnerable."** (*David Lose*) Whatever our desire for strength and security happens to be, the leader to whom we look is the one who leaves **behind** all strength and power and status, emptying himself and taking the form of a servant (Phil 2:7) in order to redeem those who are weak, vulnerable and lost. And, guess what? **That includes us!** This one whom we call "Lord" is the one who **redeems us** today, **forgives us** always, showers and bathes **us** in suffering **love**, and sets **us** free to **stand with those** in need

around us as we see **in them** the very presence of the God who **always** takes the side of the **vulnerable**. **That** is what good leadership, true servant leadership, looks like.