

“The Shepherd King”

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Jeremiah 23: 1-6

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The music - the mystery - the history - the drama

<https://youtu.be/EQ9ftKMWTW4>



How many of you recognize that video intro? (or this picture?) How many of you have binge-watched the entire season 3 of ‘The Crown’ already?

‘The Crown’ is an award-winning television series about Queen Elizabeth and the royal family. One of the things I enjoy about the series is meeting each of the new Prime Ministers. Since she has been queen, she has now had 14 different Prime Ministers serving the United Kingdom! Some of them are wonderful and others not so much. I can’t help but wonder what she thinks of Boris Johnson. At 93, she’s probably thinking she’s getting too old for this!

This is Christ the King Sunday. Next Sunday begins the season of Advent, as we prepare for the birth of Jesus at Christmas. Before we launch into Advent and prepare for the baby born in a barn, we remember who Jesus really is.

The image of the Shepherd-King is a strong image and motif in the Bible. I suspect it goes back to King David who was Israel’s favourite king and had literally been a shepherd before being called to be king.

It is interesting to bring the two images together. If we were to name the qualities or even the job description of a shepherd, we’d use words like protector, guide, provider, care-giver, even healer. The focus of the shepherd is of course the sheep. His job is to make sure the flock is taken care of – that they are led to decent pastures, because sheep eat a lot and graze an area down to nothing in a short time. The job is to make sure that they are healthy, that they are protected from wolves and other predators, and that they are accounted for and none have wandered off. The role is entirely focused on the sheep.

If we were to describe a king, on the other hand, I think we’d have quite a different picture in our minds. Word association would bring up words like castle, treasure, royal robes, crown... (Btw: where does the king keep his armies? In his sleeves!☺) If we think about the king’s subjects; we think of them bowing, scraping and serving the king.

Last Sunday I preached about the time of the kings in Israel and Judah’s history. After King David and his son King Solomon there was a long series of bad kings, some worse than others. Last week we talked about an exception,

King Josiah, a rare good ruler who was sadly a blip on the map in the series of bad.

Jeremiah was a prophet (not a bullfrog) in and around this time. A prophet is someone who hears God's voice clearly and is charged with telling the people of God the messages from God. In the Old Testament scripture reading we read today, Jeremiah speaks God's words of judgement on the kings of Judah. The prophecy given by Jeremiah indicates that God does not see the role of a king to be one of living in luxury and ignoring or mistreating the subjects because he can. It is clear that God sees the role as looking a whole lot more like a shepherd than like an emperor. And yet in this the kings of Israel and of Judah have failed miserably. Instead of gathering and tending, they have scattered the sheep. The last thing a shepherd wants to do is scatter sheep – that is certain death to the sheep. God's judgement is that they have done exactly that. The kings have sometimes looked more like the predators than like the shepherds they were called to be.

Because these shepherds, these leaders have done such a bad job, Jeremiah continues to prophesy saying: *"The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land."* (Jeremiah 23:5)

A new king is coming who will follow and fulfill the promises of God. As Christians we believe that Jesus is that righteous branch and that wise king. We believe that Jesus is the fulfillment of the prophecy.

Of course, Jesus didn't look much like a king. Instead of wealth, Jesus was born and was raised in poverty. He was born in a stable, a barn instead of a castle. Instead of a scepter he had a wooden shepherd's staff. Instead of a crown of jewels, they placed on him a crown of thorns. This was not a king like any other. Jesus led a very humble and ordinary life.

Jesus hints throughout his ministry at who he really is; do you remember when Jesus says to Simon-Peter: *"Who do you say that I am?" Peter answers "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God"* and Jesus answers *"Blessed are you Simon, son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood but by my father in heaven."* (Mt 16:15-17)

Even though we hear statements like this, it is really not until Jesus dies on a cross and then comes back to life that the eyes of the disciples are opened and they really see Jesus for who he is. It is one thing to see with your physical eyes, it is another to see with the eyes of faith. After the resurrection and with the Holy Spirit filling them at Pentecost, the disciples see Jesus with new eyes.

When you look with the eyes of faith, you do not see a poor itinerant preacher with no home of his own, but a king, the Lamb of God, on the throne.

A few weeks ago, we had a conference or retreat here in the church called 'Set Free'. Set Free is a retreat that works on inner healing and forgiveness. Each time I've done the course it has had a significant impact on me. This was

my third time, but this one was different because I was not a full participant — I was leader and trouble shooter. I was doing things like finding someone to turn the heat up and making sure people were in the right spots at the right time and that no one was freaking out or struggling with what was going on. So – a bit like Sunday mornings where my mind is in going in multi directions – texting Dustin about the video or making sure mics are on — I wasn't fully present to the process and content of the retreat. And yet, this one also affected me powerfully. I don't remember if it was in response to something that the leader Rev. Connie denBok said, or if it was just in prayer ... but at some point, I had a vision.

'Vision' makes it sound lofty, but it was just a picture in my mind that stayed present. *The image was of Jesus on the throne, right here in the sanctuary, and huge.* Not a life-size Jesus but a fill-the-sanctuary size image. When we get prayerful pictures or thoughts our task is to meditate on it — ponder it or chew on it a little while — and ask God what it means.

What was the message for me? The message for me was that *'if Jesus was here on the throne; that meant I didn't have to be on the throne'*. Do any of you have control issues? I do, and I sort of doubt I'm alone in that. For me it meant that if Jesus was in charge, in control, then I didn't have to be. I could serve instead. It shifted something inside me.

When things don't go according to plan I can get anxious ... and if I can't control a big thing, I'll control something smaller instead. People have a tendency to do that. Throughout the conference I felt like Jesus just kept reminding me that He is in control, not me. And it was a good thing because there were some not insignificant hiccups.

Probably the biggest one was finding out an hour before we started that the schedule we had planned everything around was totally different from the one the guest speaker was working from. We had to adjust everything, and it had implications for the music, the meals and a host of other things. But in the midst of chaos I didn't have my usual level of anxiety, and it's not because things went my way — they didn't! But when things didn't go my way or simply didn't go as planned, I was able to let it go. It has shifted something in me and deepened my understanding of prayer.

Unless we hold both images of Jesus the Christ as King *and as shepherd*, we have an incomplete picture. Growing up in a loving home and in the United Church I've not had a hard time seeing Jesus as loving and humble. When I think of Jesus, I think of the one who seeks out the lost lamb and I think of the man who said: *"Come to me all you who are weary and carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest."* Where I have had to grow in my faith is in seeing Jesus as Lord and King. Now if you grew up in a different denomination where a more judging view of God was given, you might relate more to Jesus as King, and not as shepherd. You need both. You need a God who is big enough to answer prayer, and small enough to love you and to care about the big and little struggles of your life, and to find you when you are lost.

One of the themes that are woven through this season of 'The Crown' is



the public image of the crown. Post-War England was very economically depressed. There's a disconnect and a growing discontent around taxpayers paying to support the Palace and the Royal Family when the rest of the

country is seriously struggling to make ends meet.

There's a scene in one episode where Prince Philip and the queen are eating breakfast and Philip is talking about how he is going to launch a campaign to ensure the Royals get a raise. (They had not had an increase since she became queen.) Philip says emphatically to Queen Elizabeth: *"You deserve to be paid properly! We deserve to be paid properly! I'm not going to rest until we are!"*

As he says this, the camera pans out on the incredibly opulent dining room at Buckingham Palace with the butlers lined up and waiting on them. Philip just doesn't get it! How easy it is for those in power to lose sight of their purpose to care for and serve the people!



I was so impressed last weekend with those who participated in the 'One Cold Night' event here in Brockville; sleeping outside by the Railway Tunnel to raise awareness and money to fight homelessness. Last weekend was brutally and unusually cold for November — it dipped to -17 overnight with strong cold winds.

The vigil had a total of 15 people participating and one of them, Don Armstrong, told Recorder and Times reporters that he had been living on the streets in Brockville "on and off" for most of the past six years. Homelessness is definitely an issue in Brockville, and we have no shelters for men. We do have a shelter for abused women which can sometimes help when someone is homeless. Though we don't see too many people actually sleeping in the street the way you see it in the bigger cities, they are there and there are so many more who are precariously housed. This includes people who end up couch surfing – staying on someone's couch for a few days and moving on to another friend's house – which lends itself to all sorts of abuse.



Rev. Lynn Dillabough, the minister at St. Paul's Anglican (whom we prayed for in our cycle of prayer this morning), was one those who braved the cold and slept outside.

When she announced she was doing this, I assumed she was staying in a tent — but they just had warm sleeping bags. She lasted out there for 8 1/2 hours, until about 3:30 in the morning when she woke up and couldn't

get back to sleep and couldn't stop shivering so she moved to her church office. (Remember this was a Saturday night and she had to lead worship the next morning!) I love that she did this, and no doubt had many good conversations along the way.

Our call as Christians is to worship the Lamb of God on the throne—to know that he is God and answers prayer and can make a difference in our lives. And our call is to imitate Jesus—to love the lost and the least and to be the hands and feet of Jesus. You don't have to be a king to have a calling to care for the lost and least ... and you don't have to be a sheep to look up to the shepherd and know he cares for you and will never leave you.

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be exploited but emptied himself, taking on the form of a slave, being born in human likeness and being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross. Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.
Philippians 2: 5-11

