

**What kind of king?**  
**Ephesians 1:15-23, Christ the King Sunday, Year A**  
**20 November 2011**  
**By The Reverend Barkley Thompson**

*A howl and a gibber of dismay went up from the creatures when they first saw the great Lion pacing toward them, and for a moment even the Witch herself seemed to be struck with fear. Then she recovered herself and gave a wild, fierce laugh.*

*“The fool!” she cried. “The fool has come. Bind him fast.”*

*Lucy and Susan held their breaths waiting for Aslan’s roar and his spring upon his enemies. But it never came. The Hags made a dart at the Lion and shrieked with triumph when they found that he made no resistance at all. Then others—evil dwarfs and apes—rushed in to help them, and between them they rolled the huge Lion over on his back and tied all his four paws together, shouting and cheering as if they had done something brave, though, had the Lion chosen, one of those paws could have been the death of them all. But he made no noise, even when the enemies, straining and tugging, pulled the cords so tight that they cut into his flesh...*

*“Why, he’s only a great cat after all!” cried one.*

*“Is that what we were afraid of?” said another.*

*At last [the Witch] drew near. She stood by Aslan’s head. Her face was working and twitching with passion, but his looked up at the sky, still quiet, neither angry nor afraid, but a little sad. Then, just before she gave the blow, she stooped down and said in a quivering voice, “And now, who has won? Fool, did you think that by all this you would save the human traitor? Understand that you have given me Narnia forever, you have lost your own life and you have not saved his. In that knowledge, despair and die.”*

*The children did not see the actual moment of the killing. They couldn’t bear to look and had covered their eyes.<sup>1</sup>*

---

As they hide in terror, the great Lion Aslan doesn’t fit the expectations of Lucy and Susan. Neither does he meet the expectations of his ghoulish tormenters. Aslan is a king. He is the Great King, the one whom the good creatures of Narnia have waited upon to expel the evil of the White Witch and restore goodness to the world. Great kings, they believe, wield great power. Their voices strike fear into opponents. Their appearance evokes awe. Their armies crush all who would stand against them. In Aslan, this is what Narnia yearns to see. And yet,

---

<sup>1</sup> Lewis, C.S. *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, 166-170.

the Lion becomes meeker than a kitten and dies humiliated on the Stone Table. What kind of a king is that?

Most days this would be an interesting question, but today of all days it is much more than that. Today is Christ the King Sunday, when we think intentionally about what it means to affirm that in some way Jesus Christ is, in fact, King. Around the world, Christians ask this question today, and the answers offered will vary widely.

Some will uplift the Jesus of the *Left Behind* novels, a cosmic king who whisks away true believers to an ethereal heaven and then returns to earth in violent fury to melt the eyes and boil the blood of all others in a miasma of death and destruction.

Others will present a Jesus who is wrapped in neither royal robes nor a first-century tunic but rather in a flag of red, white, and blue. The dictates of this king are scarcely distinguishable from the policies of the United States. The city on the hill becomes Washington instead of Jerusalem. “God bless America” comes to mean, “God, please get on board with whatever my particular political agenda is these days”. This is the Jesus who is akin to a liberal or conservative politician, depending on one’s preference and whoever happens to be in power during any given political cycle.

No doubt each of these perspectives truly desires a godly king who will right the wrongs of the world and dispel evil from among us. And, our prevailing understandings of how this can best be accomplished involve world power and might. The hard fist of evil must be countered, we believe, with the hard fist of righteousness. Who understands this better than God? And so, we envision Jesus the King as a warrior, a patriot, a *lion*.

When Aslan the Lion first appears in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, his regal bearing resonates with our expectations for the mythic king. But when he is shorn of his mane and bound to be butchered, we, like Susan and Lucy, are confused. How can Aslan destroy evil this way? The King of the World ends up looking less like a lion and more like...a lamb.

In a manner that completely upends our expectations, this is the kind of king that C.S. Lewis presents, and he takes his image from Holy Scripture. Jesus is the one who, Paul tells us today in Ephesians, who bears immeasurable power and will rule over every authority and dominion. He is the one who will destroy even death itself. Yes, Jesus is the all-powerful king, but his power is not like the power that we are used to and to which we usually look for defense when we are imperiled. His power is what theologian Ward Ewing calls “Lamb power”.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> Rossing, Barbara. *The Rapture Exposed: The Message of Hope in the Book of Revelation*, 112.

Like Susan and Lucy hidden in the shadows, we find ourselves completely disoriented at the thought of the Promised One lying down to the slaughter. It makes no sense to us when we read about Jesus' crucifixion in the Bible. It makes no sense to us when Christ seems to stand idly by as we succumb to the evils in our own lives. If we are honest, it sometimes makes us doubt our faith altogether. "This is God?" we ask. "This is the way a king acts? Stand up!" we want to cry. "Fight back! Meet force with force." Otherwise, on the grand scale and in our individual lives, what good is God to us?

But if we take a step back—if we are reflective for even a moment—we realize that peace and healing are never accomplished this way. Evil is never ultimately defeated with coercive power, neither on the world stage, nor in our communities and families, nor even where it infects our own hearts. Violent force meets only resistance; resistance begets resentment; resentment turns to corrosion. And the cycle of violence on all levels continues. We know this to be true, and we know that Jesus will not make this mistake by reigning like some earthly king.

How then is it that Jesus defeats evil? Scott Peck offers this:

The only ultimate way to conquer evil is to let it be smothered within a willing, living human being. When it is absorbed there like blood in a sponge or a spear into one's heart, it loses its power and goes no further.

The healing of evil... can be accomplished only by the love of individuals. A willing sacrifice is required... I do not know how this occurs. But I know that it does... Whenever this happens there is a slight shift in the balance of power in the world.<sup>3</sup>

Like a valiant king, Jesus stands up to the world's evil. He does so with his own body, broken on the cross, absorbing evil's every blow so that it spends itself on him. The power of the Lamb—the power of God who will confront violence but refuses to engage in it—transforms those who witness it. It changes the world, heart by heart, into God's kingdom.

We are reminded on this Christ the King Sunday, that through Jesus' sacrifice he destroyed death. His victory means that death has not the last word in our lives. We are, no matter what happens to us, enveloped in a love in which we will live for all eternity. This is what gives us the courage to risk living as subjects of the king. This is what empowers us to smother evil with love wherever we confront it. This is what turns the movement through our days into *real living*.

---

<sup>3</sup> Yancey, Philip. *The Jesus I Never Knew*, 204.

*At that moment they heard from behind them a loud noise—a great cracking.... The Stone Table was broken into two pieces by a great crack that ran down it from end to end; and there was no Aslan....*

*[Then] they looked around. There, shining in the sunrise, larger than they had seen him before, shaking his mane (for it had apparently grown again) stood Aslan himself.... He stood for a second, his eyes very bright, his limbs quivering, lashing himself with his tail...*

*Everywhere the statues were coming to life.... Creatures were running after Aslan and dancing round him till he was almost hidden from the crowd.... And instead of the deadly silence the whole place rang with the sound of happy roaring, brayings, yelpings... hurrahs, songs, and laughter.<sup>4</sup>*

Where once hard stone stood, grace brings life. Long live the King, forever and ever.  
Amen.

---

<sup>4</sup> Lewis, 177-179 &185.