

In one of his plays, William Shakespeare tells the story of Henry V, the king of England. I think I watched the movie version of it when I was in college, and it's all about Henry V going to fight against the French army, and they are vastly outnumbered. The day of the battle he gives this impassioned speech calling those fighting for him his brothers – he calls them this band of brothers – and they end up winning. But in one of the scenes beforehand, Henry V the night before the battle goes, and he visits his soldiers. He disguises himself so they don't know it's him. And in one conversation he has, one of the soldiers basically says to him that he thinks it's unfair the king is making them fight, and that he would be perfectly happy if the king (Henry V) himself would go alone into the battlefield.

Today, we are celebrating Christ the King Sunday and we're reminded that Jesus lives and reigns and will come again. Yet, as you think about the gospel lesson for today, Jesus standing before Pontius Pilate, what do you see? You see Jesus standing before a powerful ruler. And Jesus is in chains. He's been beaten. Blood is still dripping from his body. The spit has started to dry in his hair. Pretty soon, Roman soldiers are going to flog him, and thorns are going to pierce his head, and nails are going to pierce his hands and feet. In shame, he's going to hang from a cross. Then Pilate says it: "You're a king then?" Really? He doesn't look like much of a king. He looks powerless and weak. He looks like a failure....He looks defeated. This is a king?

Do you ever feel that way living in this world? In our sermon lesson, the apostle John sees a vision of Jesus, and he's writing to Christians throughout the Roman empire. At this time, it wasn't easy to be a follower of Jesus. Christians were persecuted. Mocked. Ridiculed. And you are his followers. You are disciples of this king, the one who looks so weak and foolish. Should it surprise you then when the unbelieving world looks at you and me in the same way? When the world looks at us, what do they see? Do they see people who are weak and foolish? Do they see people who are willing to love even their enemies who might mock and ridicule them? Do they see people who will give up certain temporary pleasures because they're striving to follow their king? Do you they view as weak and foolish?

At times in this world, it is tiring to be a follower of Jesus, and we say that as people who recognize that the persecution we suffer does not even come close to the persecution other Christians have suffered and do suffer in this world. Yet, the road of following Jesus isn't always paved smooth, and it's not always so easy.

Perhaps, the example we can relate to the most is that we each know very well another struggle - the internal struggle and battle that is going on in my own heart. Because I look at my heart and see that I'm not always so eager to follow Jesus in the face of hardship. I'm not always so eager to love my enemies. I'm not always so eager to give up temporary pleasure when it might damage my faith in Jesus. I'm not always so eager to serve and prefer much more to be served. I see a heart that is weak and tired.

Because sometimes I don't like that king standing before Pontius Pilate. Sometimes I want a different king. I want an earthly king one whose main mission is to make my life easy and comfortable. I want a king that doesn't say things like this: **"If anyone wants to come after me, he must deny himself, pick up his cross, and follow me."** I want a king who takes care of my earthly wants and desires, not a king who talks about suffering, hardship, and denying our sinful nature.

But that's not the kind of king Jesus is, and that's not the king we need. Because what we need isn't a bank account full of money that eventually will run out. What we need isn't a comfortable life without struggle. Because we had problems far greater. Our greatest problem was that we were enemies of God – separated by sin, lost and condemned creatures, and there was nothing we could do to fix it.

But then a king came. He is unlike any other king who has ever lived. Because this king had everything – as true God, he had all power and glory and majesty – as Jesus says in our lesson, he is **the Alpha and the Omega, the one who is and was and is to come, the Almighty**. He took that power, and he set it aside, and he became our brother sharing in our weakness, sharing in our struggles, and yet doing so perfectly. This king then goes and is arrested and ends up standing before Pilate, despite being able to call on legions of angels to fight for him. He goes. And unlike Henry V, he doesn't look to his brothers and sisters to help fight the battle. No, he realizes this is a mission for one. Even though he looks weak and powerless, he triumphantly stumbles to a cross, and he triumphantly walks out of a grave three days later. He wins the battle alone. The battle against sin, death, and Satan. He wins it for you.

Because your King's perfect life is now your perfect life through faith. Your King's suffering and death is your rescue and salvation. Your King's victorious resurrection is your guarantee that death cannot hold you, and death is only sleep. Thanks be to God he gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. He gives us the victory through this king who looked so weak and yet endured our sin and conquered death for us.

Now what does John see? **"Look, he is coming with the clouds," and "every eye will see him, even those who pierced him" and all peoples on earth "will mourn because of him."**

**So shall it be! Amen.**

John looks and sees Jesus coming, not in humility but in power and glory. Every eye will see him, including those who rejected him and those who killed him. That may be a frightening thought for those who have rejected him, but for us this day is not a day to fear but a day to anticipate. Why? **To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, 6 and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father**

Think about these words. Jesus has not only loved us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, he has also made us to be a kingdom and priests. Your King has given you an elevated status. Here in this world, we might try to find our worth and status in our careers, or rubbing elbows with powerful people, or the connections we might have. None of that is worth comparing to the status that Christ your King has given you. Because it pleased him to call you his brother and his sister, and that means you're part of his royal family. You are a son...you are a daughter of the King. Regardless of how much money you make. Regardless of your past. Regardless of the hardships you've faced. Through faith in Jesus, you are children of the King!

He's also made you a priest. Have you ever thought about that? You are a priest. Might be kind of confusing. In the OT, priests were people who served as mediators between God and the Israelites. Because their sin separated them from God, they needed a go-between. This was all pointing ahead to the great High Priest who removed that separation of sin. Think of when Jesus died, it says the curtain in the temple tore – that curtain represented the separation of sin, and now it's gone. That means as a follower of Jesus, you are a priest – you have direct access to the Lord, you can go to him directly, you have the privilege of not only being in his presence, but you have the privilege of proclaiming his praises and his Word.

This is something that you may not be experiencing in full until in heaven, but it doesn't change the fact that this is your reality right now through faith. John doesn't say one day we will have this elevated status. He says it's something that Christ has given you right now. That means then no matter how tired you get, no matter how hard the road may be, no matter what problems you face, your life has purpose and meaning. Because your worth and your value are found in Christ your King who loved you and freed you from your sins and because you reign with him and have direct access to the throne of God.

That's your status at work. At home. In the community. What does that status lead us to do? It says that we **"serve God."** Or as Jesus put it **"You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. 43 Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant... For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."**  
**(Mark 10:42-43)**

So, it probably shouldn't surprise us that greatness in Jesus' eyes, greatness in Jesus' kingdom, is not looking to be served, but it's using all that he has given us to serve him and others. We can serve our families, we can serve our neighbors, we can serve even our enemies because our worth and status are not found in ease and comfort, it's not found in being right, it's not found in human praise and popularity. You have something better in Jesus, and because of that you can look at your life entirely differently now – it's a life of service to him and others.

In that play, Henry V gave a stirring speech telling his subjects that they were his brothers, his band of brothers. Truth be told, Henry V needed those brothers to fight for him and fight with him. Jesus' greatness is found in this – he came into this world to fight alone and to fight for us. And he won. Even though he does not need us or what we might bring to his team, his glory is that he calls us his band of brothers and sisters, and now sends us into this world to proclaim his kingdom of peace and salvation. You are a son. You are a daughter of the King. And my brothers and sisters, that's all you need. Amen.