

Second Sunday after The Epiphany – 2024

1 Samuel 3:1-20

1 Corinthians 6:12-20

John 1:43-51

Americans aren't particularly fond of kings. Oh, we may watch *The Crown* on Netflix or herald LeBron James as King James and some might still fancy Elvis as the king of rock and roll but we don't want anybody ruling over us. Americans aren't particularly fond of those who pose as an elevated form of humanity. King George treated Americans rather poorly in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and we have a long memory. George Washington had folks whispering in his ear that he would make an outstanding monarch and he roundly dismissed the idea.

There's a story behind the name of our congregation. In 1969 there were two separate LC-MS congregations in town. One was an established parish named Christ Lutheran Church and the other was a mission start named St. Mark Lutheran Church (they were meeting in a public school building – not sure that would be allowed today). The Pacific District advised the leadership of both congregations that our town couldn't support two LC-MS congregations and suggested that they merge. This property was purchased and a committee was formed to hammer out the details of a merger. Pastor Paulus was called to serve the newly minted congregation but what would the name of the church be? In the midst of that conversation, one ole boy blurted out, "It doesn't matter what we call it so long as Christ is King." Everyone's eyes widened. It was a moniker epiphany.

Is Christ your King? Does He rule over you? Is Jesus of Nazareth an elevated form of humanity?

St. John tells us that Jesus *decided* to go to Galilee. The intent is unmistakable. Jesus decided to go to Galilee for the express purpose of finding Philip and Nathaniel. Follow me. Is it a command or an invitation? Follow me. What did it mean? What does it mean? Did Philip know what he was in for? Take up your cross and follow me (Matthew 16:24). Did Philip know that following Christ would lead to his martyrdom? History tells us that Philip was crucified. Follow me. Are you here because the Lord Christ has called you to follow him? Follow me. Is that like the children's game "Simon says" or "Follow the Leader"? Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus; did she follow Jesus by sitting at His feet and listening to His teaching (Luke 10:38-42)? Did Stephen follow Jesus by praying for his enemies as they killed him for his confession (Acts 6-7)? Conversely, Peter denied the Lord three times (Luke 22:54-62). When our Lord was arrested and the rabble accused Peter of being in league with this trouble-maker, Peter denied that he even knew Jesus. Does that mean that Peter wasn't a follower?

Jesus called James and John, fishermen, sons of Zebedee. "'Follow me and I will make you fishers of men.' Immediately they left their nets and followed him" (Matthew 4:19-20). There's not much looking back in that passage. A pillar of salt doesn't make for a good disciple. What have you left behind? What behavior that was commonplace for you have you left behind because it is simply not in keeping with being a follower of the Son of God? God told Lot that He was going to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah. The sin in those OT towns had reached a level that cried out for judgment. God told Lot to abandon that place. Sulfur and fire would rain

down upon them and Lot hesitated (Genesis 19:16). God was merciful and the angels seized Lot and his wife and his two daughters by the hand and brought them outside the city. “Escape for your life. Don’t look back” (Genesis 19:17). Reluctant to leave, falling behind and disobeying clear instructions, Lot’s wife looked back and she became a pillar of salt.

Follow me. It is a conditional call? Does Christ’s call mean that we follow Him mostly, or when it suits us, or when the sun is shining, or when it feels good, or when Christ’s name is popular or when it doesn’t cost too much? (too much being a line created by your sophisticated perception). I’ve told you before that I know a great deal about you, and that is true. I know the things that you have left behind to follow Christ for I have left them as well. What have we left behind, to one degree or another? What have we forsaken for the sake of knowing Christ (Philippians 3:8)? Mercilessness; we don’t look back by retaining a vengeful spirit, harboring bitterness against others. We’ve left mercilessness. We’ve left deceit. We’ve left covetousness. We’ve left greed. Follow me. Yes, Lord. Though You were rich yet for our sakes You became poor so that we, by Your poverty might become rich (2 Corinthians 8:9). Follow me. Follow me into my death and resurrection and you will be a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17). My life will be in you. Follow me. The power to comply with Christ’s call is in the Word itself. Follow me. The words are direct, without adornment. Hidden within those words is the very power of God and His will to save (Isaiah 55:10-11).

Philip was called by Christ and St. John gives us the impression that Philip immediately went out and found Nathanael. “We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of Joseph” (John 1:45). Nathanael didn’t have an eye for it. Can anything good come out of Nazareth? Nazareth was a backwater; nothing impressive about Nazareth. Philip responds deliberately. “Come and see” (John 1:46). Jesus sees Nathanael approach. The Lord Christ was there when Nathanael’s name was written in the book of life. When Nathanael was in his mother’s womb, the King of the universe was there, saw him, fashioned him (Psalm 139:13-16). As Nathanael’s character was being formed by pain, by love, by responsibility, by guilt and turmoil and joy and forgiveness – the Son of God was there. Nathanael is the clay and the Potter knows His work. “Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit” (John 1:47). Nathanael is incredulous. A simple question becomes a divine door to an epiphany of omniscience. “How do you know me?” “Jesus answered him, ‘Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you’” (John 1:48).

That was enough for Nathanael. Out stream words of identification, words of joyful praise, words that have their compatriots in your heart, your mouth. “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel” (John 1:49). Yes, the King of Israel; Jesus is the King of Creation, the King of the cross, the King of love and life and forgiveness and mercy and truth and hope. Christ the King is a concise and perfect statement of faith, a statement of truth. Jesus reigns. Jesus reigns from the tree. Our King wears a crown of thorns. Roman soldiers mock Him. They draped Jesus with a purple robe, and Pilate spoke to the crowd: “Behold, your king!” (John 20:14). As His flesh is torn by whip and spike and spear we see an elevated form of humanity. Christ crucified is the apex of God’s glory and that glory is for you. For you He died. His blood has washed you in baptism and His elevated form of humanity is in you. You’ve been crucified with your King (Galatians 2:20). Follow me. Buried with Him in baptism, you have been raised

a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17). Follow me. Christ the King decided to come after you, to find you, to call you by name, to make you His own. Follow me.

The King who rules over you is the King who serves you, who opens heaven for you, who feeds you with His grace. The King who rules over you loves you and gave Himself up for you. The King who rules over you took the lowest spot in order to elevate you to His Father's eternal realm. Jesus' blood marked the inauguration of His kingdom. He rose again. Our crucified King lives! He rules in this place and throughout this creation. Love is His coat of arms. A cross and crown is His coat of arms. We very much like our King. We follow Him. Like Peter, we fail. Like Peter, we are forgiven, restored, and blessed. Christ the King has called us by name and we follow Him. This is most certainly true.