

Is This Your King?

Fr. Thomas Ryden

November 24, 2024

Scriptures: Daniel 7:9–14; Psalm 93; Revelation 1:1–8; John 18:33–37

One thing I have noticed about the English language is that while it is good at expressing many things, we have some linguistic holes in our vocabulary. So here are just a few words that exist in other languages that we need in English.¹ The Filipino word, “gigil,” means “the urge to pinch or squeeze something that is irresistibly cute.” Appropriate for this week’s apparent turn to winter, the Danish “hygge” is a “feeling associated with sitting around a fire in the winter with close friends.” And finally, no we won’t be doing these for the next 20 minutes, is the Spanish, “sobremesa,” which refers to that time spent around a table after a meal, talking, joking, being together, something I hope we all get to experience this week with the Thanksgiving holiday. We need words for these things!

A time I came face to face with a hole in the English language was when I learned that in Ancient Greek, there are two major words for time. “Kronos” refers to time in the sense of seconds and minutes, hours and days. It is the language of expiration dates and 40 yard sprint records. “Chairos,” also often translated as “time” when we see it in our New Testaments, has the sense of the right time or time on a grander scale. It brings to mind the ideas of eras and epochs, hard times and good ones, the fullness of time.

¹ I got my examples from this article, along with definitions:

<https://www.mentalfloss.com/article/50698/38-wonderful-foreign-words-we-could-use-english>

We of course have this concept of time distinct from our wristwatches. We think of seasons and moments. This difference was fairly intuitive for me as I had always had a sense about the changes in my life, breaks from school and schools return, leaving home and the life changes of marriage, ordination, and parenthood, all of these seemed to occur, not necessarily at the perfect practical moment, but in the right time in the narrative of my life. For everything there is a season, the Preacher of Ecclesiastes tells us, and indeed it is so.

I think this sense of time was a part of my draw to the liturgical calendar of the Church. Growing up in a very evangelical and free church space, I had an initial allergy to anything that felt too high church or formulaic. I figured if it wasn't in the Bible then it wasn't something I needed.

But the liturgical calendar keeps time so well. It helps us to understand that we live, yes in the kronos of days and weeks, seconds ticking away through our brief lives, but we are also a part of God's story in his timing, a story that hangs on the person and life of Jesus. And that is what the liturgical calendar does - it orients our sense of time within the story of Jesus. And with that, this low-church kid was won over.

We come today to the last hurrah of our liturgical year, Christ the King Sunday. The journey that we will begin again next week with the anticipation of Advent, followed by the joy of Christmas, the revelation of Epiphany, the lament and repentance of Lent, the resurrection hope of Easter and the sending out into the world of Pentecost

has come to its end. Today serves as the exclamation point at the end of that liturgical sentence. That exclamation point declares with a shout that Jesus is not only our friend and redeemer; he is our Lord and King. It is the right time to be reminded of this glorious truth.

I don't know if you have been paying attention to the discourse on the Internet, and I hope for your sake, you haven't. But if you have, you may have heard over the past 6 months or so that this assertion, that Christ is King, has become a bit of a controversial thing to say. Without getting into all the details, what is simply a basic tenant of the Christian faith, what all Christians have believed for nearly 2000 years, namely that Christ has ascended to the right hand of the Father and reigns with a name that is above every name, this beautiful and true expression of the faith has been co-opted by racist and anti-semitic actors, blasphemously making, "Christ is King" something to be chanted at political rallies to communicate a certain ethno-politics. What a poor use of such a beautiful truth.

Russel Moore writes well of this controversy for Christianity Today. Speaking to those who would co-opt Christ's kingship for earthly means, he says:

"Be careful what you wish for. Christ as king, the way he defined it, is not good news for those who want to use Christ in order to become kings themselves."

Moore continues:

"Something dark is haunting the world right now. The old gods of blood and soil are rustling. We have endured the same before. But we must not let them claim the

cross. The cry 'Christ is king' is true. That's why it must never be emptied with a satanic kind of kingship."²

So where does that leave those of us who proclaim Christ to be the King? Surely we cannot abandon this basic tenant of our faith! As the Apostle Paul would say, by no means! What we *should* do is lean ever deeper into the kingship of our Lord, understanding that as he teaches us, his kingdom does not look like the kingdoms of the world, and we will appear strange to all earthly kingdoms that would replace or co-opt his authority. So let's look at our Scriptures today to learn from them what it means for Jesus to be King.

I want to first look at our passage from Daniel, which focuses on this character of the Son of Man. This Son of Man will come with the clouds to the Ancient of Days and be presented to him and then rule with him. It is said of the son of man:

And to him was given dominion

and glory and a kingdom,

that all peoples, nations, and languages

should serve him;

his dominion is an everlasting dominion,

which shall not pass away,

and his kingdom one

²Christ Is King' Is Not the Slogan Some White Nationalists Want It to Be - Christianity Today

that shall not be destroyed.

Now there is a King! NT Wright makes an excellent point about this passage, namely that the image is of the Son of Man not descending from the clouds but ascending to them and coming before the Ancient of Days from the midst of the beasts described in the beginning of chapter seven, just as Daniel himself had ascended out of the den of lions one chapter prior in Daniel 6, and returned to his position of authority.³

But this image is not just an image of deliverance and authority. The verb that describes how the Son of Man “was presented” to the Ancient of Days in Daniel’s vision is the same expression used for the presenting of a sacrifice at the altar.⁴

This is Jesus’ own interpretation of himself as the Son of Man as we see in John chapters 8 and 12, that his presentation to the Father will be through his death on the cross. In John 8:28, Jesus tells the scribes and Pharisees that it is they who will lift up the Son of Man, a nod that it is these groups who will push for Jesus to die on a Roman cross. In John 12:32 and following, Jesus says that when he is lifted up, he will draw all people to himself. And in case we hadn’t made the connection, John gives us the parenthetical reference in verse 33 that Jesus said this business about being lifted up to tell us how he was going to die.

³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wNlcPgNcHvA>

⁴ Thompson, David L., et al. *Ezekiel and Daniel*. Cornerstone Commentary series. Dan 7:13.

Christ's Kingship points to the Cross. It is not the way of kings that steal, kill, and destroy, but the way of the King who gives himself to death for our sake. So when we proclaim him as King, we proclaim him as the one who is triumphant in weakness and sacrifice, not in earthly fame, influence, or glory. His kingdom, as he says, is not of this world.

This is a confusing thing for the powers of the world. Take our gospel reading for today. Pilate can't comprehend it. He tries to get Jesus to explain his kingdom, and in some ways it seems like Pilate is trying to help get Jesus out of trouble, but Jesus just won't play his game. Pilate is a power broker and he recognizes, as many did, that Jesus was somebody who commanded authority. The problem for Pilate was where this Jesus fit into Pilate's own power and authority. And so he comes to negotiate. How can we make a deal, Jesus, so we both walk out of here with an advantage? Help me help you.

How many of us try to have the same negotiations with King Jesus? "Alright Jesus, you can have Sundays and my religious obligations, but the kingdom of my business life is mine, the kingdom of my relationships is mine. You can rule over the church part of my life, but my anger is mine. We have to draw these lines somewhere, Jesus. Maybe we can work out a deal where we both come out ahead."

But Jesus isn't interested in power plays, whether they come from Pontius Pilate or from us. What is his Kingdom about? He tells Pilate: "You say that I am a king. For

this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.”

Here is the truth. All of it belongs to him. Pilate’s love of negotiating to maintain or better his own position will lead him to condemn Jesus to die. The irony of that decision is that Pilate is standing in the room with the very one who through whom, the same gospel says, all things were created. That is the truth.

And that truth will be what is fully revealed in the end when every tongue confesses and every knee bows to Christ the King. Using the same language we see in Daniel of the Son of Man’s glory and dominion, John reminds us in the Revelation he received of the end of all things that the story of Jesus’ kingship is not over, but that the truth of his rule will be revealed to all: “to him be glory and dominion forever.” The Son of Man, now ascended to the right hand of the Father, breaks the cloud barrier once again, making all things new.

There is an inscription that was found on the western coast of Turkey that dates to the year 9 BC that extols the rule and reign of Caesar Augustus. It was written on the occasion of his birthday and it ends with a particularly striking turn of phrase: “the birthday of the god Augustus was the beginning of the good tidings for the world.”⁵ If that phrase “good tidings” rings a bell for you, it should, because you’ve heard it before.

⁵ maseiana.org/priene.htm

Just a few years later, a few shepherds would hear a very similar message: "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger."⁶

Next week we begin our liturgical year longing to hear those words as we proceed through Advent, running with the shepherds to the manger, not wanting to waste any time, because we know how the story ends. Christ is king.

But there are many inscriptions similar to the one extolling Augustus as the true bringer of the Good News. Many voices promise that if only we will give them our allegiance, our time, our money, it is they who will liberate, rescue, and prosper us. Don't give in to the hype, remember who has the last word.

Perhaps the biggest voice we have to tune out is our own clamoring for the throne of our hearts. We want to be like Pilate - Jesus can be king in his own little way, just so long as it doesn't mess with our rule. He can have the title. Sure, put the label on him, but if necessary we expel him to the Hill of the Skull outside the city.

Next week, we begin the story of Jesus again. Never forget how that story ends. Never forget that his ways will make us strangers and aliens in the eyes of the world.

⁶ Luke 2:10-12

Never forget that our King is known by his Cross, the same one he calls us to pick up daily.

Brothers and sisters, we serve the true King. He is good and glorious beyond all measure. And yet, we have a parade of poor substitutes constantly before us vying for our eyes, ears, and hearts, most of them of our own making. And so, we must proclaim it again and again, every morning, every hour if we have to, Christ is King! To him be the glory, with the Father, and the Holy Spirit, now and forever, Amen.