

Christ the King

The Rev. Dr. E.
Stanley Ott

John 18:33-37

“You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me” (John 18:36b-37).

When Ann Marie and I were here for worship the Sunday before last, we were a little dizzy, as life has certainly been in spin cycle for several weeks. Wrapping up, if that is even possible, our time in Pittsburgh, getting the house ready to put on the market, working with a variety of presbyteries in the renewal of their congregations through the Vital Churches Institute, and beginning the process of shifting here has kept us spinning.

We were hugely encouraged by that Sunday service here. The ministries of music led by Lance and Kerry were wonderfully uplifting. Pete’s sermon spoke right to our spirit. After worship, Charlie Bowden walked up to introduce himself and to tell me he knew my dad and my uncle. As the child of an army officer who moved every few years, I know very few people who knew my dad. That was so encouraging and it thrilled my cousins. When we walked out that morning, Ann Marie said to me, “I felt very much at home.” Me, too! God is good.

Now, I am aware of how I often feel when a new pastor speaks. Will he or she know when to stop? When I spoke at the Leadership Forum here a year ago, I told them of a preacher who didn't know when to quit. He started preaching and went on and on and on and on and on and on and on...and on!

Finally, a person sitting in the choir behind the pastor could stand it no more. He took off a shoe and threw it at the preacher. It missed him and went out and hit a woman on the head, who was sitting in the front row. "Hit me again," she said, "I can still hear him!" I promise to be good. I will also keep my eye on the shoes of the choir!

Today is actually a rather unusual Sunday. Usually the Sunday after Thanksgiving is the first Sunday of the four Sundays of Advent—the season of preparation and of anticipation of the celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ. Since Christmas Eve falls on Sunday this year, Advent doesn’t begin until next week, and this special Sunday is known as Christ the King Sunday—a great day to remember the person whose Advent we celebrate.

To think about the kingship of Jesus is to remind ourselves that Jesus isn’t a babe in a manger any longer. He is risen from the dead, King of kings and Lord of lords.

The conversation between Jesus and Pontius Pilate says it so clearly. Jesus said, “My kingdom is from another place.” “You are a king, then!" said Pilate. Jesus answered, “You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me” (John 18:36b-37). Indeed, we discover passages throughout the Bible that

His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed” (Daniel 7:13-14).

Jesus is the almighty King, who is greater than anything you have imagined.

speak of the kingship of Jesus, who is often referred to as the Son of Man.

For example, from Daniel 7: “In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven.... He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed” (Daniel 7:13-14). Jesus Christ is king!

Or from Matthew: "Say to the Daughter of Zion, 'See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey'" (Matthew 21:5). “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory” (Matthew 25:31). Jesus is king!

And from the Book of Revelation: “On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS” (Revelation 19:16). King of kings and Lord of lords says it all.

Sometimes, we have this idea of a meek and mild Jesus, of a teacher and a healer, and we miss the implications of his kingship, that he is Lord, the almighty God, the King of kings! When I was about twelve years old, my dad was stationed at West Point, the military academy. I remember an amusing event that happened just after the annual Army-Navy football game that year. Dad accom-

panied the Corps of Cadets on their trip to Municipal Stadium in Philadelphia. After the game, dad and a few cadets were having dinner in a Philadelphia restaurant, when a man who'd had too much to drink came over to their table and saw those clean-cut, good-looking, young men in their gray uniforms. He began to taunt them and ridicule them for their uniforms, for their choice of career and whatever else he could think of. The cadets just sat there. Their lack of response to the man enraged him.

Finally, he walked over to who appeared to be the smallest, shortest cadet and, in a fit of anger, grabbed the cadet's arm. Now, it just so happened that this particular cadet was one of the strongest men in the entire Corps. Dad said when the man grabbed that cadet's bicep, his arm, which was bigger than an average person's thigh, he froze and had the strangest look on his face. His hands went up and down the cadet's uniform sleeve feeling the muscles, and suddenly he dropped the arm and bolted for the door, leaving the table in laughter. There was much more to the cadet than that man ever imagined. There is ever so much more to Christ the King than you have ever imagined. He is, to use a wonderful word from the Old Testament, El Shaddai, which means God Almighty. Jesus is the almighty King, who is greater than anything you have imagined. “Oh, the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! For who

We are to bend the knee—bend our minds and wills to Jesus, the almighty King and confess with our mouths that Jesus is Lord.

“In [Jesus] him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence” (Ephesians 3:12).

has known the mind of the Lord, or who became his counselor?” (Romans 11:33-34 NASB).

Jesus is King in authority, majesty, power and honor. And what are we to do? “Therefore, God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:9-11). We are to bend the knee—bend our minds and wills to Jesus, the almighty King and confess with our mouths that Jesus is Lord.

And wonderfully for you and for me, Jesus is not only El Shaddai, the King who is almighty, he is also the King who is approachable. Not every king is approachable. You may recall that when Queen Esther wanted to visit her husband, the king, she knew that a person who approached the king’s presence without being invited would be killed, unless the king extended his gold scepter to the visitor. Jesus Christ is the King whose scepter is always extended to you. The New Testament says: “In [Jesus] him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence” (Ephesians 3:12).

We have just returned from a wonderful Thanksgiving with Ann Marie’s mother in West Lafayette, Indiana. When I was growing up, my family always celebrated Thanksgiving with only the family

members present which, of course, was great fun because we enjoyed being with one another. Now I have shared in countless Thanksgiving dinners with my in-laws, and you know something—I cannot remember one single time in over thirty years that the only people present at the Thanksgiving table were family members. This year, as every year, there were others invited into their home and to the table. So, I have learned a lot about approachability and hospitality from Ann Marie’s family, and what it means to be approachable—to be welcoming.

Once, there was a four-year-old boy by the name of Matthew eating an apple. He approached his father. “Daddy,” said Matthew, “why is my apple turning brown?” His father explained, “Because after you ate the skin off, the meat of the apple came in contact with the air which caused it to oxidize, thus changing its molecular structure and turning it into a different color.”

There was a long silence, and then Matthew asked softly, “Daddy, are you talking to me?” Sometimes we are not as approachable as we might imagine. The hospitality and approachability of Jesus is overwhelming. “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I [Jesus Christ] will give you rest.” When he says “rest,” he doesn’t mean a place to sleep. He means a place, a person to trust. And when he says “all,” “come to me, all,” we remember that all means “all”—including you and me! In other words, no matter what is going on in your life, no matter how wonderful

Will the coming season of Advent just be a time of busyness or will it also be the Advent of your life as you approach Jesus, to touch and to experience Jesus, in a new way?

“Are you thronging Jesus, are you crowding Jesus, or are you touching him?”

- Harry Fifiield

or disappointing or inappropriate you may think of some aspect of your life, you are welcome to approach Jesus. His golden scepter is extended to you right now!

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). As the Book of Hebrews puts it, “Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need” (Hebrews 4:16). He is the approachable king.

The hospitality and approachability of King Jesus is remarkable. The question of the day is, “Are you approaching him?” Will the coming season of Advent just be a time of busyness or will it also be the Advent of your life as you approach Jesus, to touch and to experience Jesus, in a new way? Many years ago, when I was a student at Georgia Tech, Harry Fifiield of the First Presbyterian Church in Atlanta preached a sermon that made a huge impact on my life. He told of when Jesus was walking along with a huge crowd surging around him and his disciples. The crowd was like the crowd that flows out of a stadium after a game, with people pressing and pushing and bumping each other. People were leaning into Jesus as they crowded around him, trying to hear him and to get a glimpse of him. And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years. She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all

she had, yet instead of getting better she grew worse. When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, because she thought, “If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed” (Mark 5).

So, this woman is thinking she will approach Jesus. If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed. She touched him and immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering. At once, Jesus realized that power had gone out from him. He turned around in the crowd and asked, “Who touched my clothes?” “You see the people crowding against you,” his disciples answered, “and yet you can ask, ‘Who touched me?’” But Jesus kept looking around to see who had done it. Then the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell at his feet and, trembling with fear, told him the whole truth. He said to her, “Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering.”

The question Harry Fifiield asked of us, and I ask of you, was, “Are you thronging Jesus, are you crowding Jesus, or are you touching him?” In other words, are you just one person in the crowd, such as this crowd just bumping into people with smiles and Hi’s? Or are you connecting with Jesus, approaching Jesus? Jesus wants you to move beyond experiencing church to experiencing God, from crowding around him to touching him. He is the approachable king. His light is on, His door is open and His majesty awaits your approach.

***His light is on,
His door is
open and His
majesty awaits
your approach.***

***Nothing in
your life leads
Jesus to keep
you away.
Nothing.***

I love the story of one John Todd who "...was born in Rutledge, Vermont, into a family of several children, in the early 1800s." Both of John's parents died when he was a very little boy. His relatives wondered what they would do with so many children. They decided to parcel them out among friends and relatives, and one dear and loving aunt said she would take little John. The aunt sent a horse and a slave to get John, who was only six at the time. The slave, Caesar, came and put the little boy on the back of the horse. On the way back, an endearing conversation took place:

"John: Will she be there?
Caesar: Oh, yes, she'll be there waiting up for you. John: Will I like living with her? Caesar: My son, you fall into good hands. John: Will she love me? Caesar: Ah, she has a big heart.

"John: Will I have my own room? Will she let me have a puppy? Caesar: She's got everything all set, son. I think she has some surprises, too. John: Do you think she'll go to bed before we get there? Caesar: Oh, no! She'll be sure to wait up for you. You'll see when we get out of these woods. You'll see her candle shining in the window.

"When they reached the clearing, sure enough, there was a candle in the window and she was standing in the doorway. She reached down, kissed him, and said 'Welcome home!' She fed him supper, took him to his room, and waited until he fell asleep.

John Todd had come home. [A precious person and a precious place] He grew up to be a great Christian man. His aunt, his new mother's home was always a place of enchantment for him. It awed him that she had given him a second home. Years later, long after he had moved away, his aunt wrote to tell him of her impending death. Her health was failing, and she wondered what was to become of her. This is what John Todd wrote her:

"My Dear Aunt, Years ago I left a house of death not knowing where I was to go, whether anyone cared, whether it was the end of me. The ride was long but the slave encouraged me. Finally, he pointed out your candle to me, and there we were in the yard and you embraced me and took me by the hand into my own room that you had made up. After all these years I still can't believe it—how you did all that for me! I was expected; I felt safe in that room—so welcomed. It was my room. Now it's your turn to go, and as one who has tried it out, I'm writing to let you know that Someone is waiting up. Your room is all ready, the light is on, the door is open, and as you ride into the yard—don't worry, Auntie. You're expected! I know. I once saw God standing in your doorway—long ago!"

She who once made her home approachable was offered a home by our approachable Lord, the very almighty King Jesus Christ who prepares a place for you. Nothing in your life leads Jesus to keep you away. Nothing. His light is on and his door is open. The coming

***The coming
Advent season
is your
opportunity to
approach him
and bend your
knee to him—to
touch him by
faith and to
follow him.***

Advent season is your opportunity to approach him and bend your knee to him—to touch him by faith and to follow him.

Lord Jesus, some of us entered the sanctuary this morning in a wonderful place, and for others of us, it is a difficult time. Yet we know that you extend your golden scepter to everyone of us, and we would, by faith this day, reach out to touch you and to love you and to be loved by you. Amen!