

From 2014 to 2018 we passed through the centennial of World War I. The causes of WWI were certainly complex and can't be oversimplified. But there is no doubt that much of the responsibility for WWI can be laid at the feet of the European monarchs. The sinful pride of the Kaisers, Kings, and Czars of Europe, the saber rattling of the descendants of Queen Victoria, contributed heavily to the beginning of the war. Some 8 million soldiers died in WWI. And the monarchs themselves did not all escape unscathed. By 1918, the Czar was executed, and the Kaiser was living in exile. In a way, World War I was the last gasp of old-fashioned kingship. In World War I, kings failed their people miserably, and they paid the price.

One WWI documentary had a wonderful quote from a Russian peasant who encountered his king, Czar Nicholas II.¹ The peasant says,

"This is what happened to me when I met the Czar. Imagine to yourself that you believed in some inaccessible person, so that in that person were united all the finest qualities, all the strength, the wisdom, and holiness of Russia."

But then the peasant meets the Czar, and his picture changes. He says:

"All of a sudden, at the bidding of fate, you are placed eye to eye with that person. And you see, with sorrow and fear, you see that he is not what you supposed. The glitter around him and the splendor are all there, but it's all a sham. Thus, I saw in front of me, not the Czar of my imagination, not the sovereign of my dreams, not even a big man, but just a little fellow on very ordinary legs."

It's very clear from this peasant's description, that Nicholas did not live up to his expectations of what and who a king should be.

As Americans, we often equate kingship with tyranny. After all, we dispensed with our king in the Revolutionary War. We don't always have good examples of monarchs elsewhere. Queen Elizabeth seems like a nice lady and has a profound sense of duty shared by some of her family members. But other members of that same royal family have been involved in their share of scandals. They don't always provide us with positive role models of what kingship is all about.

Yet, on this last Sunday of the church year, Christ the King Sunday, we say in our collect for the day that Jesus Christ is "King of kings and Lord of lords." We proclaim and acclaim Jesus as our King. What does that mean?

Actually, that Russian peasant I quoted sums up many of the qualities of true kingship. In that person, in the king are united all the finest qualities: all the strength, all the wisdom, all the holiness. No ordinary human king can ever possess all these qualities. Only a perfect king can. On Christ the King Sunday, we celebrate this perfect king.

Unlike earthly kings, Jesus has been given total power, now and in the future.

Our Epistle from Ephesians expresses this in wonderfully poetic language. Paul says that God raised Jesus from the dead, and then gave him supreme kingly authority, authority no human monarch could ever match.

¹ "The Great War," PBS

In the words of Ephesians,

"(God raised Jesus) from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come."²

This is incredibly rich language. God just doesn't give Jesus the power of a perfect king. He places him above any other possible authority or power, not just now, but in any age to come.

Not only that, Paul says,

"(God) he has put all things under (Jesus') feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all."³

That's an amazing statement that puts Jesus above any conceivable earthly monarch. Jesus is the head over ALL things. Jesus fills all in all, everything in every way.

That's amazing, and that's certainly worth celebrating on Christ the King Sunday. But Paul doesn't just stop with this description of Jesus' total kingly power. He also speaks of what Jesus does with this power.

He shares it with the rest of his body, his followers his church. We are part of that church. We are part of Christ's body.

Jesus is given total kingly power. And he lavishes his gifts upon us. Paul describes it as

"The riches of Christ's glorious inheritance among the saints... and the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe."⁴

The Russian peasant who encountered Czar Nicholas II was disappointed. He was expecting someone with all wisdom and power and strength and holiness. But he only saw an ordinary man.

We, in turn, follow Jesus Christ. Yes, he lived among us as a seemingly ordinary man. But Jesus truly possessed all wisdom and holiness and strength. His power exceeds the power of any human leader or ruler or king, past, present, or yet to come.

This week we come to the end of our church year. It has been a very difficult year. And yet, we can end this year in hope. We are part of the body of Christ. We share in the power Jesus gives us, the power which transcends any earthly power. His love for us is a perfect love. And because we live under the umbrella, under the shield, under the protection of his power and love and authority, we need not be afraid.

² Eph 1:20-21

³ Eph 1:22-23

⁴ Eph 1:18-19

We do not need to fear anything. Not disease. Not political strife. Not economic difficulties. Not even death itself.

Jesus is our king. He will never fail us. Human leaders will fall short. But Jesus never will.

And he promises us perfect life in his perfect kingdom. To him be glory and praise forever and ever.