

“Crown Him Lord of All” (Christ the King Sunday)
Rev 1:4b-8; 19:11-16
By John Gill

I’ve always been fascinated by the fairy tales and folk-lore stories we all heard read to us as we were growing up – and which we have, in turn, retold to our children and grandchildren. In every culture going back for thousands of years, these stories have been passed down, from one generation to the next. I suppose we have told these tales in order to teach our children wholesome values that will help form them into morally upright adults. In some of my previous congregations, I have preached a series of sermons on the Biblical truths that are conveyed in many of these stories – a series I called, “The Gospel According to ‘Once Upon a Time.’” Maybe I’ll share those messages here in Sebastian someday.

One of the common stock characters that recurs in many of these stories is “Prince Charming.” He always comes to the rescue of the “damsel in distress” who is being threatened by some malevolent force or demonic figure. Prince Charming must engage in a quest to liberate the beautiful princess from an evil spell. Of course, he is handsome and brave. And, in spite of the challenges he faces, he always defeats his wicked foe, kisses the princess winning her heart, and together they ride off into the sunset on his white horse – to “live happily ever after.”

Our scripture texts this morning are from the Book of Revelation, the closing book of Holy Scripture. And while I’m certainly not suggesting the contents of John’s visions recorded in this mysterious book are “fairy tales” or “fantasy,” I do see parallels with the “Prince Charming” stories we were told as children.

Of course, the image we are given in the Book of Revelation of the victorious Christ, our “Prince Charming” riding to the rescue on a white stallion, is much more grand and magnificent and awe-inspiring than the handsome young prince of the fairy tales. But, the mission is the same – the promise that the son of the king, the very Son of God, will one day come riding in on his white horse to rescue the Church, his Beloved, his Bride, to defeat evil and sweep us away to live with him “happily ever after” – that mission is exactly the same. When you distill the Book of Revelation down to its most basic meaning – that’s it! Who knew fairy tales were so theologically profound!

As the Bride of Christ, we are the “damsel in distress,” longing for our Prince Charming” to come to our rescue. This has always been so, in every generation. But seldom have we felt quite the level of “distress” we have been experiencing in the year 2020! There is a Latin phrase used to describe such seasons of our lives: Annus Horribilis (the horrible year). (You may recall that Queen Elizabeth used that phrase in a speech in 1992 – about a particularly difficult year for her family.) Yes, 2020 has been pretty horrible – never our lifetimes will we be more happy to see a year come to a close! Let’s all hope that 2021 brings more happiness and joy. As Christ’s “damsel in distress,” we can hope and pray that our “Prince Charming” will make his appearance soon! As the final verses of Holy Scripture pray: “Come, Lord Jesus!”

2020 is nearly over – and good-riddance! But, sadly, we are still suffering in the grip of this Annus Horribilis. The pandemic still rages. Racial tensions still are increasing. Our nation is still severely divided. And our government still is dysfunctional, seemingly incapable of providing even the basic functions of our democracy. It even appears that we are losing the capacity to transfer power from one administration to the next without contention. Yes, we are still in distress. We desperately need our Prince Charming to come save us.

Today is Christ the King Sunday – the final Sunday of the Church Year cycle. It is a serendipity that this high holy day falls in the midst of this contentious political season, for it is a check on our runaway political passions, and the hopes and faith we place in political parties and politicians to become our “Prince Charming” - our Savior.

In this election, we have foolishly placed our hopes in political “Messiahs” that reflect our own political preferences. At the same time, we have declared our opponents as being our “enemies” and “evil,” not simply to be defeated, but destroyed. We have acted as if political figures or parties are our “Savior” and we have made them our “Lord.” We desperately need to be reminded that only “Jesus is Lord.” Christ the King Sunday crowns the Church Year, declaring that only Jesus is “King of kings, and Lord of lords.” We are fools to think or act otherwise.

We dare not place our hope in worldly power or authority. As followers of Jesus, our loyalty is only to Jesus Christ – not to Trump or Biden, or anyone else. We are certainly not the first to place our ultimate faith in political or worldly powers – trusting that a king or a president or a political movement might “save us” and usher in a utopia or establish a reign that guarantees that those who think like we do will prevail.

The Jewish people, throughout their long and troubled history, looked for the coming of their own “Prince Charming,” – a messiah – a worldly military or political figure riding a white horse who would lead them to victory over their enemies, usher in an age of security and glory for the Jewish people, and establish a Jewish kingdom – so they might live “happily ever after.” They placed their hope in worldly power, and it only led to disaster and heartache.

No – seeking a “messiah” figure to “save” us from the evil we perceive around us is nothing new. The Jewish people expected a worldly Messiah to exert worldly power to overcome evil. So, when the Messiah actually appeared in Jesus Christ, a spiritual Messiah to exert spiritual power over evil, most people missed it. Jesus was executed for threatening that mistaken understanding of the mission of God’s Messiah.

Friends, we dare not place our hope in human leaders – not ultimately. Human leaders will always fail us - because no matter who is declared the winner of this election, Christ is still King! Our hope should be in Christ alone.

Our Scripture Lessons from the beginning and ending of Revelation make it clear: Only Christ is the “Great I Am” who is and was and is to come;” “the Alpha and Omega,”” the Beginning and

the End. Only he is the pure “Word of God;” the One who is always “Faithful and True.” He is the “Ruler of the Kings of the Earth” who wears many crowns. Only He is “King of kings, and Lord of lords.”

Christ is our divine “Prince Charming,” riding in on his white horse to rescue his Bride.

The Book of Revelation vividly reminds us that kingdoms and political parties rise and fall – only God’s Kingdom ultimately matters! Christ is the only One in whom we must put our trust!

That is the meaning of this Christ the King Sunday. It is why it is the culmination of the Christian calendar, the cycle we rehearse every year. These passages from Revelation remind us that Jesus – the baby in the manger, the meek and mild teacher in Galilee, and the dying figure on the cross – is also “King of kings and Lord of lords!” He will come again in judgment to set things right. And then, in victory, he will sweep us up - his Beloved, his Bride, the Church, - onto his white horse, so that we all may “live happily ever after.”

In the meantime, we wait for our Prince Charming to arrive, and for the coming of the Kingdom of God for which we pray every time we pray the Lord’s Prayer. And as we do – as we wait – we work. We do our best to bring God’s kingdom “on earth as it is in heaven,” knowing full-well that we will fall short. But, we do what we can to help our society, our nation, and our world live by, and conform to, the teachings of Jesus. That is the mission of the Church of Jesus Christ! But, when all is said and done – Christ will ride in on his horse and judge the nations – and us – for how well we lived the Gospel he preached.

Next Sunday begins the Season of Advent – a season of anticipation of this “Coming of Christ.” Of course, we will retell the stories of God’s incarnation in the baby born to Mary – but we also anticipate the coming of the victorious Christ when he will declare victory over the forces of evil and establish once and for all the Kingdom we pray for every Sunday.

On this Christ the King Sunday, we are reminded that Christ was born to turn all our worldly expectations of power on its head. Throughout his ministry, Jesus taught us that the way of greatness is not through power or clinging to worldly authority – it is through servanthood and loving others, loving even our political enemies!

When he comes in judgement, he will hold us accountable to – not how loyal we were to the Republican or Democratic Parties, or to any political figure, or even to the United States of America. When Christ rides in on his white horse, he will judge us on how well we have done in loving others – even those who are on the other side of the political divide, those we consider to be our adversaries, our enemies, - or even traitors. As one of my good friends, Carl Tews, put it perfectly in a Facebook post: In America, “The love of power has hijacked the power of love.”

As I mentioned in my message two weeks ago, the final exam question the victorious Christ will ask us when we stand before him in judgement will be “How well did you fulfill my final

command while I was with you in the flesh?” (And what was that command?) ‘A new commandment I give you, that you love one another.’” This fraught political war we as a nation are engaged in is a “test case.” Will we be governed by hate or by love? Will we declare our ultimate loyalty to a political party, or a politician, or to God? How will Christ judge us on Judgement Day?

As I said, next Sunday is the beginning of the Advent and Christmas Seasons. This year, the season will feel different to us, as we are in such a stressful time. The political turmoil we are all living through, the raging pandemic, the threat of illness and the possibility of untimely death, all can lead us to despair and depression.

As we move into this gloomy Advent and Christmas season, it’s all enough to make us ask: Is there any hope?

The world seeks after worldly messiahs and saviors. But they will all ultimately fail. We dare not trust in them.

The world tries to convince us that political power and military might are the recipes for glory – that we should place our trust in kings and princes and prime ministers, and presidents – that “might makes right.” But that’s not what the Gospel of Jesus Christ teaches. In fact, Jesus taught just the opposite.

The Book of Acts in the New Testament describes the impact the first Christians were making on the unbelieving world as they fanned out across Asia Minor preaching the Gospel. In the seventeenth chapter, Paul and Silas have come to city of Thessalonica declaring to the residents that Jesus is the Messiah, the King of kings and Lord of lords. They didn’t want to hear it! Those words were so threatening to their own political and religious loyalties that the crowd became angry, and shouted, “These people who have been turning the world upside down have come here also.”

And of course, they were absolutely correct. When Christ rides in on his white horse – when he “comes with the clouds” and “every eye” will behold him, - then he WILL indeed “turn the world upside down!

But, in reality, when you stop to think about it - he actually will be turning it “right side up.”

Only then, can we hope to “live happily ever after.”

In this anxious and stressful Advent, where do we find our hope? That will be theme of our sermons during the Advent Season. The series is called: “Christ’s Gifts that Turn our World Right-side Up.” Love in the midst of hate; Peace in the midst of turmoil; Joy in the midst of Sorrow; and Hope in the midst of Despair.

I hope you will plan to join us each Sunday in-person or on-line as we once again prepare our hearts to welcome Jesus, our Divine Prince Charming. Amen.