

Sermon for Christ the King Sunday  
Daniel 7:9-14 Psalm 93 Revelation 1:1-8 John 18:33-37  
November 26, 2006  
St. Mary of the Hills, Blowing Rock  
The Rev. Jeanne Finan

### **My kingdom is not from this world...**

Last Sunday afternoon, in the Youth Confirmation class,  
we talked about sacraments.  
You may remember from your own confirmation days,  
that the Church defines a sacrament  
*as an outward and visible sign  
of an inward and spiritual grace.*

In the Episcopal Church we have two sacraments:  
Holy Eucharist and Baptism.  
We will share in both of those sacraments this morning at the 10:10 service.

To begin our discussion about baptism,  
I showed the Youth Confirmation class  
a clip from the animated film *The Lion King*.

In this particular film clip, which comes at the beginning of the movie,  
the sun is rising over a breath-taking African landscape  
and animals are running from all directions.  
There are giraffes and zebras,  
elephants and leopards and monkeys--  
lots and lots of monkeys!!  
There is great anticipation, a tangible hopefulness--  
you sense that something wonderful is about to happen.

There is a new baby lion, Simba,  
and, already everyone knows,  
that Simba will one day  
rule their animal kingdom as King of the beasts.  
This is good and joyful news  
because a good king takes care of his people  
(or in this case, his animals!)

The baboon—the animal chosen to be the priestly presence in the film--  
takes the baby lion cub and marks his forehead with some purple goo  
(your guess is as good as mine as to what that is)  
and then lifts the tiny Simba up  
so the entire animal crowd can see the newest member  
of their community,  
the baby that will grow to be their king.

There is great stomping of feet and chattering of birds and monkeys.  
Then all the animals bow down.  
for they realize that Simba,  
this baby lion, is their future, their hope.  
This is their king.

And the people—I mean, the ANIMALS—are grateful.

And that perhaps is the heart of why we celebrate this Sunday  
as the Feast day of Christ the King.  
Because in Jesus, the way he lived his life  
is what we Christians see as our future, our hope.

Today is a Sunday of celebration—  
and part of our celebration today (at the 10:10 service)  
is the baptism of Jack Proctor.  
There is much to be grateful for this morning.  
Celebrating is a way of showing gratitude, of giving thanks.

This feast day did not exist until 1925.  
It was added to the church calendar as a reminder  
to acknowledge and celebrate Christ's kingship over all creation.  
Pope Pius XI,  
who first established this feast day on the Roman Catholic calendar,  
was worried that people were becoming too enchanted  
with their own worldly power and position.  
(Don't we wish the addition of a feast day could really solve that problem!!)

But even from the beginning this feast day was a bit controversial.  
Some Christians felt the language of kingship  
was outdated or irrelevant or even oppressive.

Now I, like most of you,  
    have never been a citizen of a government ruled by a king.  
For some of us the idea of a king  
    evokes images of tyrants,  
    spoiled royal bullies  
        with inherited and abusive privilege and power.  
For some of us, the idea of a King is completely unreal,  
    someone out of a fairy tale or a movie.

Speaking of movies, go back to *The Lion King* for a moment.  
    Growing up, Simba did not really understand what it was to be king.  
    He didn't want that kind of heavy duty responsibility.  
He wanted the life of *hakuna matata*—  
    Remember that phrase?  
    It means *no worries*.

Our first reading from the Book of Daniel this morning  
    tells us about a prophetic dream.  
Daniel sees a vision of God—the Ancient One—  
    seated on a throne  
        surrounded by *a thousand thousands*  
            and *ten thousand times ten thousand*—  
            you do the math  
                or just grab the idea  
                that there is an enormous crowd of folks  
                    gathered around God's throne!  
(I think that is all of us—witnesses to what is about to happen).

Daniel sees in his dream a vision of one *like a human being*  
    *coming with the clouds of heaven--*  
    and to this human being was given dominion and glory and kingship.  
Perhaps Daniel's dream was foreseeing the coming of Jesus;  
    Perhaps Daniel's dream is telling him—and us—  
    that God has worked and does work and will continue to work  
    through human beings.  
We are the hands and the feet and the heart and the hope of God  
    in this world.

We are going to seal Jack Proctor this morning with the sign of the cross,  
mark him as Christ's own forever.  
Jack's baptism, like our own, does not end at that moment.

Baptism is an action word.

Our baptism says *yes* to willingly accepting  
our unique role in the kingdom of God.  
Our baptism is the beginning of our journey,  
a journey fueled by our on-going promises  
of working to make earth as it is in heaven,  
To do what we can to make God's kingdom come—right now.  
And there is the repeated acknowledgement that we cannot do it alone—  
we can only do it *with God's help*.

In the reading from John's gospel this morning,  
Jesus and Pilate are talking.  
Pilate is trying to give Jesus some wiggle room  
to escape his death sentence.  
Just play the game right, Jesus, and you can walk away from all this.  
*Hakuna matata.*

Pilate asks a question.  
*Are you the king of the Jews?*

Jesus isn't going to play the game.  
He wants Pilate to face the truth:  
*Do you ask this on your own or did someone else put you up to this?*

Pilate does not want to face the truth—  
he's been around long enough to know--the truth is dangerous--  
so he asks Jesus again:  
*So, are you a king?*

Jesus answers, *You say that I am.*  
That sounds like a rather flip and evasive answer  
until we hear the second part of Jesus' response:  
*My kingdom is not of this world.*

That is the truth.

Jesus is the King of a world that puts love and peace and justice  
ahead of all personal gain.

Jesus is the King of a world that invites tax collectors and sinners  
to come to the table.

Jesus is the King of the world that wraps its arms  
around children and women, widows and orphans—  
anyone who suffers from  
no power, no position, no wealth.

That kingdom is not of this world.  
Not in Pilate's day,  
not yet in our own day.  
Almost 2000 years have passed  
and God's kingdom  
is still not of this world.

But there is hope.

When we can believe as true the fact that God truly loves us—  
our whole persons, not bits of us, as David Adam writes—  
then we will claim our own role  
in the kingdom of God.

When we can believe as true the reality that God suffers  
when any part of the Body—  
any part of the community suffers—  
then we will bind ourselves together  
with the compassion of Christ the King.

When we can believe as true God's unconditional and unlimited love,  
that no place, no person, no part or piece of creation  
is devoid of God's presence,  
then we will inherit the desire to transform the earth—  
and our own hearts with it.

When we can believe and live into the truth of those promises  
we make in our baptismal covenant:

--to persevere in resisting evil...

--to seek and serve Christ in all persons...

--to love our neighbors as ourselves...

--to strive for justice and peace among all people...

--to respect the dignity of every human being...

then we will see the kingdom of God  
in this world.

Right here.

Right before our very eyes

Such love, such prayer

Changes everything.