

Sermon for the Reign of Christ, and the baptism of Noah Davids
26 November 2017
Matthew 25: 31 - 46

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There are days in the church calendar that we anticipate with delight. Advent and Christmas, Easter day, Pentecost.

I have never heard anyone say that they are looking forward to Reign of Christ or Christ the King Sunday. We don't even know what to call it!

But there are good reasons to be excited that today has arrived. It is the Feast of Christ the King and for us here at All Saints it is the baptism day of Noah and both of those are cause for rejoicing!

Noah, I'd like to tell you about how welcome you are in this place, and what a good day this is. This congregation says you are welcome in this place whether you come once or many times; whether you come often or occasionally. So you are welcome simply because you are here.

You belong here for a more important reason though – a reason that has little to do with the good people of All Saints and everything to do with the King whose day this is. You belong here because you are beloved of God, and today we will formally welcome you as our brother in Christ.

Kings have Kingdoms and Kingdoms often have hierarchies. There are clear ideas about who is most important and who is second-most important and so on down through the rows of people lined up by their significance.

Today you will be baptised into a Kingdom that is not at all like that. We do like processions, but here we say everyone is important – that we depend on each other. Priests can't preside at communion alone – the presence of another person is as important as the presence of a priest. I am no more important or valuable than you are in this Kingdom.

It is a particular kind of foolishness in a world that puts so much stock in achieving, winning and performing. You can't even talk yet, Noah. We don't know what you will grow up to do, how you will change the world by being in it. But you are as beloved of God as any other person in this room. Or any other person in the whole wide world. In baptism you

become an inheritor of a Kingdom that turns everything upside down, making the last first and the first last.

Noah, today, in your baptism, we declare you to be the equal of every other person in the Kingdom of God: beloved of God, the one on whom grace and mercy and love and delight are showered.

You will see that in the way your parents and grandparents and family and friends love you and delight in you and shower good gifts of grace and kindness upon you. I hope you will know it in your family here at All Saints and in the church communities you will be part of as you grow. And as you grow, I hope you will grow in the knowledge and love of God and in certainty of God's love for you, God's delight in you, God's faith in you.

I want to say something about this Christ who is King.

The way we decide what to read on a Sunday is a system called the Revised Common Lectionary. That means Christians all over the world are reading this same set of readings. And they are a three year rotation. This is Year A, and in Year B in our Gospel reading we read about Jesus on trial and dying, and in Year C we read about Jesus on the cross, dying and it is difficult to understand how to see a glorious King in the picture of a dying man.

And this year, we get another kind of surprising story.

This is a story about Jesus, the Jesus who is hungry, homeless, a prisoner, sick... Who can imagine a King who is hungry or thirsty and can't provide his own needs? Who would think of a King who can't afford a castle?

Noah, our King is a surprising King.

We say our King reigns over all the earth.

And we say that we see that King most clearly in the face of the people we often don't pay much attention to.

They don't have Instagram profiles that are making them wealthy.

They aren't on the pages of magazines, jetting around the world, giving us something to aspire to.

They are lonely, and hungry, and have no clean water, no place to live.

They are in need.

This is the Gospel promise: that God regularly shows up in those places and persons we least expect God to be.

David Lose puts it this way:

“God regularly, even relentlessly, shows up just where we least expect God to be. Not in Jerusalem or Rome, but in backwater Bethlehem. Not in armour but in the vulnerable flesh of a babe. Not in conquest but in crucifixion. Not in power but in weakness.

Again and again, God in Jesus shows up where we least expect God to be to surprise us, disarm us, overturn our expectations and judgments, all in order to invite us to give up our attempts to redeem ourselves – or even just to go it alone”

And what is the alternative to redeeming it ourselves or going it alone? It is to know that we are completely, deeply loved and delighted in by this God.

This God whose face we see in the hungry, the homeless, the stranger, the sick, the prisoner... the last and the least.

And knowing we are loved, we are called to share that love. To follow in the way of Jesus. Noah, this is the way your parents are choosing for you. They do so as an expression of their love for you, and their love for God.

This is the way of humble service.
This is the way of self-giving love.
This is the way that turns the wisdom of the world on its head.
This is the way of feeding the hungry, providing clean water to the thirsty, embracing the stranger, clothing the naked, caring for the sick, visiting the prisoners.

Noah, this is the life into which you will shortly be baptised.
You are buried with Christ in death,
and raised with him to resurrection life.
We will make the sign of the cross on your forehead and say,
you are sealed by the Holy Spirit in baptism and marked as Christ's own
for ever.

This is your King, Noah,
the one who is found in the face of those we too often ignore,
who chooses the last and the least,
the lost and the lonely,
who welcomes children to himself.
Let us now baptize you in his name.