

**Trinity Church Wall Street 11:15am Holy Eucharist – Trinity Sunday
The Rev. Phillip A. Jackson Transcript**

“What We Mean By Christ the King”

Before Jesus, kingship meant strength, power and dominance. Because of him, preaches the Rev. Phillip A. Jackson, it was changed forever. “That’s the gift that Christianity brought to the world. Power, as it’s been known, has been revealed to be powerless.” When we think about Christ the King, Father Phil urges us not to think about “crowns, chariots, scepters and robes,” but rather the lowly, humble, and poor. “They are the nobles in Christ’s Kingdom.” The readings are 2 Samuel 23:1–7, Revelation 1:4b–8, and John 18:33–37.

Sermon Transcript:

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Please be seated, everyone.

It's good to see everyone this morning. It is particularly good I might even say, great to have as our musical guests today, Christian McBride, Melissa Walker, and their supporting musicians. What a treat. I will be in conversation with the two of them at one o'clock today and I just cannot wait. I really cannot wait. Being around people, being in conversation with people who are doing something that's at such a high level as the two of them is just energizing to me and I cannot wait to talk to them. I got plenty I need to ask, and so I'm excited. Today. Does anyone know what today is in the church year? Christ the King. What that means is that today is the last Sunday of the church year. The church year begins on the first Sunday of Advent and always ends with Christ the King Sunday, the last Sunday of the season after Pentecost, and that is today. And so we celebrate, remember, reflect upon, which is what I'm going to do this morning, reflect upon what it means to say Christ the King. It's difficult for us, I think to wrap our cognitive hands around Christ the King for at least two reasons. The first reason is we don't really appreciate kingship the way the ancient world did, or even let's say several hundred years ago. We have no model of it nationally of what kingship is. All we have today really, I think most of us, when you think of king or queen or royalty, who do you think of? The British monarchy. Which frankly, as kingship goes, is somewhat of a parody of the thing. Sorry, it just is. It's just silly and yeah, well, you get it. Let's not beat up on them. Yeah. But it's not really kingship as the ancient world as antiquity knew kingship.

Kingship meant power, real power, power over the lives of men and women and children. Power that could be exercised well, but power that frequently was exercised randomly and for self-serving reasons and for the benefit of the holder of power. Kingship could frequently be like that and it's one of the reasons why quite frankly, we are no longer under the British monarchy. Because we broke away from that model of wanting that or at least putting up with that. That's one reason why I think we don't really appreciate kingship now because we don't know it. We don't live under it. It cognitively just doesn't line up with us. The second reason I think we don't really understand kingship these days in our world is because to be a king in antiquity meant you could do whatever you wanted to. You could do whatever you wanted to if you were the king. The king was, as I said, all-powerful. The king could exercise

that randomly, the king could exercise it well. But the king's law, the king's word was immovable. You did what the king wanted you to do. The king was an element or a symbol of the strength of a people or a nation. The king meant strength, the king meant power, the king meant will. The king meant you do what I say, and you do not question it. Kings were up here high above us in the great chain of being, as they called it in the middle ages. Kings were up here, the people, we're down here. Everyone knew that that's how the system was. The king was here, the clergy were here, the knights and the nobles were here and the people were down here. The great chain of being. It's the lack of understanding of kingship that makes it difficult for us to understand finally this passage we have today on Christ the King Sunday.

This passage, the short little clip from the Passion of Saint John. This dialogue between Pilate, who represents the emperor, and Jesus, who is a backward itinerant preacher from the Galilee. I got these two very different people. You've got the Lord and Pontius Pilate, who was up here representing the emperor and you have in the scene, this backward peasant. It's from some backwater place that Pilate wouldn't think about it. They're in Jerusalem together on that last week of Jesus's life, and Jesus has brought before Pilate for possible insurrection. This tableau that we have that we don't really pick up on is this one between great kingly power and absolute servility. What if you were in antiquity, what you would have picked up on in this scene instantly was its absolute rightness. It's rightness. That which is power is questioning that which is a not. If doing so somewhat contemptuously, are you the King of the Jews? Really? You are? Jesus's come back is so beautiful. You say. But I'm not a Jew, am I? Your own people say this, that you're saying this. He says eh. He brushes off power. He says, "My Kingdom is not from this world." If my kingdom were like your kingdom, my followers would be fighting to get me free. But they're not. Because in my kingdom, my followers don't do that. He retorts. Setting up this interesting dynamic. It's interesting dynamic. If you are a person in antiquity, you would've looked at this scene and the subsequent condemnation of this man and his being sent away dismissively to be executed, you would've looked at that scene in antiquity and said, yeah, that's what happens. You bet, he got his just desserts. Yeah, that's what happened.

You would have instantly in antiquity seemed the rightness of the sentence, the condemnation, and the execution. It would have been a natural outcome of where this scene was heading and we would have all just said, that's how power does. That's how power does, and we would have gone about our business. That's just what power does to the lowly. It would have seemed naturally right. Except that, today we don't hear that scene or read that scene in that way, do we? Who's the figure that we identify with compassion in that scene? Who? Jesus, right. We identify compassion with him. Who do we revile in that scene? Pilate. In antiquity, we'll be exactly the reverse. What's this scene has done, believe it or not, we're like fish swimming in water now because this is now the water we've been swimming in and we don't even see it. What happened in this very scene is that the whole valuation of values turned on a dime and the world would never be the same again. We can't see this scene the way antiquity saw it because we live in a world that he changed in the sin. Does that make sense? Because of what happens here. Because of a redefinition of what it means to be a king and what it means to hold power because of this very sin, we can't read the sin anymore like they did in antiquity, it's changed forever. Kingship changed forever, power changed forever. It can never go back to the way it was. We are like fish who are swimming in water and don't even know what water is. That's the gift that Christianity brought to the world. Power, as it's been known, has been revealed to be powerless. The powerless, and the low, and those on the bottom, and those who don't count, and those who don't matter, and those who have no place, and those who have no say, and those who have nothing in this new kingdom are up here.

I was coming in this morning, walking on Pine Street, I would walk by the big city plaza, and I'm walking about to cross it, this young man comes up to me and he stops me. He's, sir, could you hold on a second.

Just wait there for a second, we're filming. There's a scene that's being shot right now. If you could just hold on for just a second. Now, you going to appreciate the juxtaposition that I twistedly made, because there's this scene being shot for either a TV show or movie, happens all the time around here. There are literally 100 people there. That's not including the extras, they're like 100 people behind cameras, with the clipboard, and all this stuff. He's like, could you wait here, sir? Then that's on my right, on my left, is the homeless shelter. Then these brothers and sisters out there on the homeless shelter watching the movie being filmed, and I'm thinking, who's got the power in this scene? Who do we give the power to? That's the Hollywood machine. It's got power. They spend money on that. It's probably, I'll bet you that scene probably cost hundreds of thousands of dollars to shoot. I almost stopped and got a sandwich at the eight did the breakfast cart. Why not? I mean, they got all this stuff, all these extras, all this cast, all this crew, hundreds of thousands of dollars spent. Hollywood's got money, power. Then on the other side, these humble folks who were relocated by the city to the shelter cross the street. In Christ's kingdom, who are the nobles? Yes. Amen. The homeless are the nobles. The homeless are the nobles. Those who have nothing are elevated. Those who have been brought low, we talked about this last week, the humble are exalted, the rich sent away empty. We talked about that, and it was like watching it happen this morning. When we think about Christ the King, don't think about long robes, don't think about crowns and sectors, chariots being pulled by horses. When we think about Christ the King, think about the humble, and the lowly, and the servants, those in need, those without, those who are hungry, those who are poor. They're the nobles in Christ's kingdom.

Amen.