



**Good Shepherd Lutheran Church & School**

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A Stephen Ministry Congregation

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**Last Sunday of the Church Year**

**November 20, 2016**

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**“King of Kings, Lord of Lords”**

Rev. David K. Groth

**COLLECT:** Lord Jesus Christ, You reign among us by the preaching of Your cross. Forgive Your people their offenses that we, being governed by Your bountiful goodness, may enter at last into Your eternal paradise; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

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"We want a king like all the other nations!" God's ancient people looked at the nations around them, the palaces, the pageantry, the splendor, the royal banners under which their armies fought, and they wanted all that for themselves. They wanted a king like the other nations to lead them in battle and give them a sense of national security and unity.

Luther wrote, "Their sin was . . . that they set their trust on human help and government when they should have trusted in God alone. This was a grave sin" (AE 52:187). If you were thrilled by the results of November 8, or devastated, that might indicate you too are trusting too much in human help and government when our trust should be in Christ alone.

In any event, the Lord noticed his people's misplaced trust. In 1 Samuel 8:7, the Lord says to Samuel his prophet, "They have rejected me as their king." We can still hear the sadness and disappointment. They were denying the covenant relationship with the Lord, who himself had pledged to be their savior and deliverer. They were rejecting the One who had brought them up out of Egypt, the One who had fed them in the wilderness. They were rejecting the One who had defeated the Philistines for them. All they had to do was be still. They were rejecting the One who gave them the Promised Land.

Samuel tries one last time to dissuade the people. "These will be the ways of the king who will reign over you. He will take your sons and make them serve with his chariots and horses, and they will run in front of his chariots . . . he will take your sons to plow his ground and reap his harvest, and still others to make weapons of war. He will take your

daughters to be his perfumers and cooks and bakers. He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive orchards and give them to his servants. He will take the tenth of your grain and of your vineyards and give it to his officers and to his servants. He will take your male servants and female servants and the best of your young men and your donkeys, and put them to his work. He will take the tenth of your flocks, and you shall be his slaves. And in that day you will cry out because of your king, whom you have chosen for yourselves, but the Lord will not answer” (1 Sam. 8).

The phrase “he will take” is repeated six times. Whereas God had given everything, their kings would take everything.

Verse 20, “They refused to listen to Samuel. ‘No!’ they said. ‘We want a king over us!’” Hearing their obstinate rejection of Him, the Lord tells Samuel, “Listen to them and give them a king” (v. 22).

Often, the Lord punishes sin with sin. He doesn’t have to invent or bring in some kind of outside punishment. He doesn’t have to inflict anything upon them. He just lets them have it their way. Chasing after their sin is punishment enough. We see this happening also in Romans 1, where in response to the wickedness and unbelief, quote, “God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts.” As an act of judgment, God allowed sin to run its course.

We see it also in Exodus. God gave Pharaoh nine chances to free the Israelites from slavery. The message from Pharaoh is, “Let my people go.” The message from each of the plagues is “Let my people go.” But after each plague, quote, “Pharaoh hardened his heart.” After the tenth plague, the plague of the first born deaths, Pharaoh finally relents and tells Moses, “You and the Israelites, leave now! Take your flocks and herds and go!” And so they did. But after a little while, this time it wasn’t Pharaoh who hardened his heart. This time the Lord hardened Pharaoh’s heart. He punished Pharaoh’s sin with more of the same sin, and it led to the destruction of Pharaoh’s army.

In 1 Samuel, the people are demanding a king like all

the other nations. And by way of punishment, the Lord let's them have it their way.

Like God's ancient people, our actions often say to God, "Not Your will, but mine be done." We insist on things that may not be good for us. And God is surprisingly flexible and generous in letting us have it our way. You want to drink yourself into a buzz, to the point where sober judgment and inhibition disappears? He'll let you do it. He'll let you have it your way. He'll let that sin run its course and that will probably be punishment enough. It might lead to a DUI. It might lead to liver problems down the road. It might lead to an affair that wrecks your marriage or an angry and ill advised text you send. It might be your son or daughter secretly losses respect for you.

There are countless ways to rebel against God and God is surprisingly flexible and generous in letting us have it our way. But there are just as many natural consequences, where God doesn't even have to lift a finger to discipline or punish. Often letting the sin run its course is punishment enough.

The Lord is surprisingly generous in letting people have it their own way. He even gives people the ultimate freedom, the freedom they most want, freedom from the Lord.

A common perception in our society is that God sends people to hell. But I suspect he doesn't have to. They pretty much get there on their own steam. You never meet people who say, "That's where I want to go when I die." But we do know those who feel no need for a Savior and who say "no" to Jesus every chance they get. And God treats them with enough dignity to give them that ultimate freedom.

We want a king like all the other nations, the people said. They would get their kings, and that would be punishment enough. But the Lord would also give them and us another king, and he would come with be grace enough.

He would be a different king. He would come from the house and lineage of King David, for sure, but he would be born in humble circumstances, not a Jerusalem palace but

in some rotting shed behind someone's house in some village.

Of course the old order of kings would still be up to their wickedness. You recall how Herod, jealous for his reign, like many kings before him, attempts to eliminate the competition. Even if it means the slaughter of innocents, that's a price Herod is willing to pay to ensure his power and authority.

But Jesus, he's a different kind of king, who did not count power and authority with God something to be grasped at. He wasn't power hungry. In fact he emptied himself and became a servant instead.

Remember how the devil took him up to a high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. 'All this I will give you' he said, 'if you will bow down and worship me.'" Any other kind of king would have leapt at the chance. But Jesus could not be bribed or bought. As John writes, "In him, there is no darkness at all" (1 Jn. 1:5).

He went about teaching and healing and feeding the people, and of course, they loved it, and thought how nice it would be if he would do that for them all the time. So they hatched a plan to make him their king. But John writes, "Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself." He would have none of it, at least, not like they thought of kingship.

Like all the other kings before him, this King too had an inner circle, who jostled for power and position. So this King got down on the floor and washed their feet, showing them what power and position are all about.

This King spent much of his time teaching about his kingdom, and how it was not of this world. He taught that no one could buy, bribe, or otherwise earn their way into his kingdom. One is never born into it; one is brought into it, by grace. He taught the Kingdom, in its glory, would be like a great royal wedding feast, but not just for the ruling elite. Instead, all are welcome, both good and the bad.

This king is very different from other kings. He gets no pleasure from war and bloodshed. He loves peace. All the power of heaven is within him, yet he often chooses not to exercise it. He allows himself to get hungry and thirsty and tired and weak. He allows himself to be interrogated by a mere provincial governor. He allows himself to be mocked with a purple robe. A crown of sorts is pressed on his head. A scepter of sorts is shoved into his hand, and knees are bent and tongues confess his name, but not in reverence. And he allows it.

This king is very different. Of him, it is said, "Thou hast put all things under His feet" yet he allows nails to be driven through those feet. He is told, "If you are the king, save yourself." But he has their salvation in mind, not his own.

A notice is written above him that reads, "This is the king of the Jews." The people lobby Pilate to change that sign so that it reads, "This man said he is the king of the Jews." With that they were rejecting him as their king, just as they had thousands of years earlier when they first asked for a king. They did not want this kind of King on a cross. Though all mankind treated him shamefully, he treats mankind with dignity and gives them that ultimate freedom.

Because of his victory and because of his grace we belong to him, not as subjects or vassals, but as his dearly beloved people. Service in his kingdom is not the forced service of a slave but it's cheerful and free and marked by gratitude. He doesn't impose taxes, but we freely and thankfully and joyfully give back to him a percentage of what he has given us.

All power belongs to Christ our King. Unchecked power in the hands of an earthly king is a terrible thing. In the hands of Christ it is a source of joy and comfort. Today when puny countries with puny dictators are developing intercontinental missiles tipped with nuclear warheads, it is very comforting to know that not one of those tyrants can lift a finger without the consent of the Lord of lords and King of kings. There are lots of little kings and little lords in the

world. But there's only one King of kings, and Lord of lords (1 Tim. 6:15).

And in a day when no one is really sure how this is going to work with President-elect Trump, (or any other ruler for that matter), it is so very comforting that we have another King, God's Son Jesus Christ, who is good and wise and powerful.

And finally, it is very comforting also to know that, for the sake of his elect, our King is coming back to take us home to his kingdom of glory. That's where our citizenship is. That's where we will live under him in his kingdom, and will serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness." "Now, to [that] King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God . . . [to that king] be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen." (1 Tim 1:17).

