

This week it has been William and Kate this, and William and Kate that. And I don't even have to mention last names. Most people know that I'm talking about Prince William and his bride to be, Katherine Middleton. Everyone is talking about the newest royal wedding and when it will be, where will it be, and what will Kate wear. Never mind that Great Britain has been governed by a Prime Minister and parliament for over 300 years. The official role of the monarch now, to inform, advise and warn. The Queen is a figurehead. But we love talking about the Queen and all the drama that attends royal life. There's something romantic and fairytale-like to imagine the benevolent King or Queen who rules her subjects justly and always does what is good and right.

In ancient Israel, after the period of the Judges, around 1000 BCE the people wanted a king, just like the other nations around them. So they got themselves kings, and most of them weren't all that just or all that good. Jeremiah and Isaiah and other prophets began to talk about a king who was to come who would be different than all those who had gone before. This new king would be of the same royal pedigree, but very different. "He shall execute justice and righteousness. Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety". That was the prophecy of Jeremiah. The desire to have someone who will save us and protect us seems to be part of our psyche.

We think what we want is an outward change of circumstances – a new king – but what Jesus shows us is that it is an inner transformation that brings life out of death.

In the lifetime of Jesus many began to believe that Jesus was that man who was to be the new king, the good and just king, the one who would bring Jerusalem back to the glory days of when the Temple had been newly built by King Solomon. This new wise king would rid Palestine of the Roman invaders once and for all, they hoped.

But for many Jesus was a great disappointment. He didn't act like any king they'd known. He didn't conquer people or land. He didn't seem to be interested in power. Then it became apparent with his

arrest and trial that Jesus was not the powerful warrior who would lead a revolt to oust the Romans and take back Palestine for the Hebrew people. In our Gospel reading from Luke today (our last one from Luke for a while) we hear of the passion of Jesus. He is being crucified ignobly between two thieves. Instead of a crown people hoped he would wear, he received the ultimate disgraceful death, death on a cross to serve as a warning for others.

There is no Easter glory here. There is no resurrection joy. There is only suffering on this cross for a day which we call the celebration of Christ the king. How ironic! The word of the day is transformation. This King of Kings and Lord of Lords transforms our notion of kingship. Jesus transforms what our worship of God is like and through the process teaches us how we can be transformed.

I love our stained glass windows. We are so blessed to be able to worship in a building with such beautiful artwork. In many of the windows where you see a crown – Jesus is remembered as Christ the King. Here's an interesting thing about our windows. There is the annunciation, the birth of Jesus, the empty tomb, and the disciples watching Jesus ascend to heaven. There is no panel about his death. One of the most important parts of Jesus' story, his death on a cross is not depicted anywhere in our church. In some ways this is about our Protestant theology in which we emphasize resurrection and not crucifixion. We see it in other places: Our processional cross is not a crucifix – Jesus is not found on that cross. Our Altar Cross is not a crucifix. Jesus is not on that cross either.

In Protestant theology we want to remember particularly that God did a new thing in Christ. God raised him from the dead. Christ is no longer dead and nailed to a cross so we don't want to continue to depict him there, and dwell on death and suffering. Jesus triumphed over death and is our King. But, on the other hand, without any acknowledgement that he died how do we see the transformation of sin and death? Paul tells us today in our reading that it is through the blood of the cross that we understand that God is with us to transform death into the gate to new life. There is no sugar-coating of real agony. But there is also no diluting of the real power that the cross has for Christians.

The Gospel reading doesn't seem right for Christ the King Sunday because it leaves us with Jesus on the cross. The Good news of that Gospel reading is that God is not just active in resurrection but in the reconciliation and transformation that can occur during times of great suffering. God came to be with us in Christ Jesus to show us that God knows anguish too. God suffered on the cross and is with us in our distress. We cry out when we are at our lowest point, "Jesus, remember me." And God, who is on the cross answers us, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise." Jesus is King, not because he avoided suffering but because he transformed that suffering into new life.

Last week when I spoke about the Service of the Word, I said that this week I would talk about the second half of our weekly worship the Service of the Sacrament – our Holy Communion. Recently our guest from the Diocese, Linda Snyder spoke to us about learning styles – how some people are auditory, visual, or kinetic learners. We've always known that, and our worship has always reflected that. God uses every sense we have to reach us and transform us. You may be an auditory learner who relishes the spoken word. You may be a reader who loves reading the scripture. It may be listening to the music, looking at the stained glass windows or through receiving the sacrament of Christ's body and blood. God does not force any of this on you. But there God is in the scripture, in the prayers, in the silence and in the sacrament. When you come to the altar rail, Christ's real presence is there with you if you wish to receive it. We speak of the grace of the Holy Communion that grace transforms us bit by bit, Sunday by Sunday or day by day.

One time Philip and I were in a church we visited on vacation. I had been troubled about what to do about a certain issue in my life. We walked into the church and hoped to find words that would help me in my troubles. I opened the bulletin to see that the readings were not ones that inspired me. I didn't particularly care for the sermon which didn't really speak to the things that were bothering me at the time. I prayed, becoming ready to receive communion.

We were towards the back of the church and so many went up to the altar before us. I could hear the priest use the old style words of institution as he gave bread to each communicant – "The body of our Lord Jesus Christ which was given for you. Take and eat this in remembrance that Christ died for you **and feed on him** in your heart by faith with thanksgiving. As I listened to the priest say the words

over and over as he went down the line, a bit of the phrase “and feed on him” kept echoing in my ears. I heard “and feed on him, and feed on him, and feed on him.” It was a mystical moment for me...very short lived, but very meaningful. It was a time when I realized that I was being told that I could lean on Jesus. I could depend on him for sustenance when I was feeling empty. I could gain strength for my journey through that little bit of bread which becomes so much more.

The transformation that took place within me that day was one where I understood that I didn’t need self-reliance to get me through a situation. We can depend on Jesus who meets at the altar every week.

Our service of Holy Communion each Sunday contains these two parts: word and sacrament. We can be nourished and transformed by God in each part of our worship or none depending on where we are at on a particular Sunday morning.

Once we are fed and strengthened then we are sent forth to nourish others with our ministries and our pastoral care. Each one of us has been given that gift through Christ our King. We become transformed and then go out to be an agent of transformation to others. We are “fed to feed, blessed to be a blessing, loved in order to love, strengthened in order to give strength. Not a bad way to run a congregation—or a world.”ⁱ

ⁱ Fred Gaiser, Workingpreacher.org - Commentary on the OT reading – Jeremiah 23:1-6