

New St. James Presbyterian Church, London, Ontario
Sunday, November 26, 2017
The Rev. Dr. David Thompson
“The Once and Future King”

Two Jewish rabbis were waiting at a bus stop, and the bus was taking a long time to come. One rabbi turned to the other and said "We have been waiting so long for this bus! It is like waiting for the Messiah!" The other responded, "Not at all! The Messiah will definitely come, eventually; but as for the bus..." "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout in triumph, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you, Humble, and mounted on a donkey, and He will speak peace to the nations; And His dominion will be from sea to sea, And from the River to the ends of the earth."

This past week The Queen and Prince Phillip celebrated 70 years of marriage. Elizabeth has been a good queen and has been notably wise. Her faith in God has been very evident. Her sense of duty has been immense. She is one of the most respected rulers in the world. As the editor of the Daily Telegraph Charles Moore once said of her "She has what the Bible calls purity of heart...she is content each day if she has done her best and said her prayers."

What a contrast she has been to other world rulers like Napoleon, Joseph Stalin, Mugabe, Putin or Donald Trump. She seems to have an understanding of what true monarchy might be about. It comes out in her speech at Christmas time particularly. Where did she get that understanding of monarchy I wonder? I remember one Christmas speech when she went to the Royal stables and talked of the birth of Christ from there. She was aware that her stables were a far cry from the Bethlehem Inn stable, but she wanted to make the point in her way, of the humble nature of the birth of Jesus. He was not born in the palace where her child Charles was born, but in the stable outside the Inn in old Bethlehem. She got that.

In the book of Zachariah there are two images of the Messiah. One is of a very humble man and the other is of a conqueror. In order to reconcile these two very different images of the Messiah, Jewish tradition began to teach that there would be two Messiahs to come. The one found in Chapter nine of Zachariah would be humble and the other in chapter 14 would be someone to reckon with who would have political power. The suffering Messiah would be called Messiah Ben Yosef and the other would be Messiah Ben David, the conquering Messiah.

The earliest Gospel, St. Mark says that Jesus wanted his Messiahship kept secret. He would say "Who do people say I am?" And after he checked with his disciples that they understood, he said that they should keep that knowledge to themselves. So, Jesus, the incognito Messiah, just went around doing good. His roots were so humble. Jesus was just a carpenter's son who became a Rabbi. Or was there something more? There were occasional flashes of something more when he stilled the waves on lake Galilee, and the disciples, as Dr. Andrew Fullerton said, became more afraid of him than the storm. But generally speaking, he was regarded as a Rabbi and as a healer. John the Baptist announced that he was something more, and the miracles did set him apart, but the Messiahship was veiled until very near the end of his ministry. Then on Palm Sunday he dropped the mask and rode into Jerusalem on a donkey deliberately triggering the prophecy. "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout in triumph, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; Humble, and mounted on a donkey..."

That kind of entrance into Jerusalem sparked speculation and immediate excitement. But Jesus understood the model of Ben Yosef which called for suffering and death. The crowds were expecting Messiah Ben David to rule in Jerusalem and were disappointed. At the time of the historical Jesus, the Jews were under the oppression of Rome. They very much wanted a political Messiah to throw off the Roman Yoke. Yet, in fact, Jesus was counterintuitive for his contemporaries. He was humble. Could a king be humble? The other Kings were anything

but!

As the Queen pointed out he was born in a stable not a palace. The wise men expected the palace and that is why they went to see Herod. The wise men brought interesting gifts though.

I love the old carol "We three Kings" and the verse: "Gold we bring to crown him again

King forever, ceasing never over us all to reign." It was counterintuitive that one would bring gold to a stable...

Then there were the shepherds on the hills and the visit of the angels with a strange message that was in fact political. It was a vision of Peace on earth and good will towards human beings. It was not a war to throw off Rome. When Jesus matured a little at the age of only 12 we find him taking a view of the Hebrew scriptures that amazed the rabbis of the time. Later probably in his thirties when he began his ministry St Luke says: "And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read. And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised," And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him.

And he began to say unto them, "This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears." But then when he reprimanded them by saying that God was active with other nations and peoples, they took offence and took him out of the city to stone him. But then it was that something more came out and he walked away through the crowd and they lost their opportunity to push him over a cliff. No, as far as his home town was concerned he was not the Messiah.

In fact, to use the title would be a hindrance, so he asked his disciples to keep it quiet. It wouldn't fly and would just be a distraction to his ministry. But then he lives before them the life of a counterintuitive King- a humble majesty, deep compassion and unconditional love.

I believe the archetype model for Aragorn in Tolkien's Lord of the Rings was the Historical Jesus... Aragorn was a king but unrecognized, he was just Strider the Ranger, or was he something more? As the tale unfolds we see Strider become the rightful King. What was Jesus like as a Messiah/king? He was kind to everyone in need, particularly outcasts like lepers, Tax collectors and muleteers and donkey drivers. He lifted women up and welcomed children. He was a healer. He was an amazing teacher and restored sight to the spiritually and physically blind.

He was a man of peace not war. He said in the Gospel lesson this morning to Pilate. "My kingdom is not of this world." He was not into power. When America went into Iraq they went in with 'shock and awe'. That did not work. They had to learn what Jesus taught as the way forward. The battle was for hearts and minds. Jesus knew that you don't win that kind of battle with brute force. He was able to let his life go and to set it down for a great cause. Above all He knew how to love. And forever in History he has been a foil for those like Mugabe and Assad who are so addicted to power that they attempt to keep it regardless of cost in lives and blood.

The only Power the Jesus of History obeyed was the Power of Love.

All peoples of the Earth only want one thing in someone who rules over them. They want Someone who loves and respects them and cares about them and has deep compassion. Where do we get that longing from? The world once knew that kind of ruler...

Dr. James Allan Francis wrote in a sermon: "Here is a man who was born in an obscure village, the child of a peasant woman. He worked in a carpenter shop until He was thirty. Then for three years He was an itinerant preacher. He never owned a home. He never wrote a book. He never held an office. He never had a family. He never went to college. He never traveled two hundred miles from the place He was born. He never did one of the things that usually accompany greatness. He had no credentials but Himself...

While still a young man, the tide of popular opinion turned against him. His friends ran away. One of them denied

Him. He was turned over to His enemies. He went through the mockery of a trial. He was nailed upon a cross between two thieves. While He was dying His executioners gambled for the only piece of property He had on earth – His coat. When He was dead, He was laid in a borrowed grave through the pity of a friend. I am far within the mark when I say that all the armies that ever marched, all the navies that were ever built; all the parliaments that ever sat and all the kings that ever reigned, put together, have not affected the life of man upon this earth as powerfully as has that one solitary life. Jesus was worthy to be King. His was the kind of rule that all of us would wish for on earth. I was attending a lecture in the theology faculty at the University of Toronto with the great Gregory Baum and other theologians, Catholic and Protestant. They were discussing the question as to whether Christ would return or not. The professor said to Baum “You don’t think Gregory, that Christ will come again on the clouds of heaven as predicted, do you?” There was a long, long pause before Gregory Baum answered. He said “We have no other revelation.” There was another long pause after that. They knew he was right. Was the man who was once King, and unrecognized in his day, to be the Once and Future King?

In the times of the New Testament there was a feeling that Christ would return in the lifetime of the writers. I think St Paul felt that, but there is a caution in the book of Matthew from the Historical Jesus himself that was largely ignored at the time and it is still very clear, and as Gregory Baum would say “We have no further revelation”: Jesus said that he didn’t know when God would act. “But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only.” There became a restlessness in the early church about when Christ might return, which the late book of Second Peter notes (that book was written probably around 165 of the common Era), and there is a reason given for the delay. The author says: Above all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, They will say, “Where is this ‘coming’ he promised? Ever since our ancestors died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation.” But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. The book of the Acts, written by Luke, raises the same question: “In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach 2 until the day he was taken up to heaven, After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. Then they gathered around him and asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” (Messiah Ben David) He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. “Men of Galilee,” they said, “why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.” This what Gregory Baum meant. As far as he was concerned this promise of Christ’s return is the last revelation we have. I was listening to a program on CBC this week talking about the deep future. The speaker said that we have no way of knowing the deep future.

This week for the first time on record our Galaxy was penetrated by a long cigar shaped object that had come from another galaxy. It had travelled millions of miles and was millions of years old. It missed earth by 6 times the distance between us and the moon. There are no guarantees that in the future such an object could not strike the earth. The CBC program was concerned that things like arsenic poisoning or nuclear waste might kill future generations as the knowledge of their inherent danger to human beings might become lost. The speaker said we have only been here on this planet for 200,000 years as a species. That is not long in space time. Who knows about the deep future; what knowledge might be lost? They might not know why they were dying...

But it is my belief that the future actually belongs to God the Father/Mother Creator. I do believe that God is patient with us in the extreme and that only the Creator God knows the future and that is a good thing. This secret, says Jesus, is only known to God the Father of all and in that mystery he leaves it alone. But there is a preparation he talks about while we wait for his coming again. It is to love as Micah the prophet taught us: “And

what does the LORD require of you But to do justice, to love kindness, And to walk humbly with your God?

One of the Messianic prophecies states that a little child shall lead them...

It was parent teacher night at a Daily Vacation Bible school. The kids were putting on a play they had learned at the DVBS school. After a lot of practice four five year old boys acted out the story of Moses before King Pharaoh. Wielding their plastic swords, the boys liked playing the very mean Pharaoh who would not let the people go. At the performance the prompter told Moses what to say " Pharaoh all the slaves are all tired and they don't want you bossing them around any more. Let my people go!"

King Pharaoh sitting on his throne, wielding his plastic sword said, with prompting, "Never, never , Never."

Moses left the room only to return a little bit later . Once again he approached the king. "Pharaoh my people are really tired of being beat up. Now will you let my people go?"

Once again the prompter said "Say, Never, Never ,Never!"

But the young King suddenly had had enough and the voice of another King deep inside of his heart prompted him. He suddenly jumped down from his throne and said " I don't want to be mean any more. All of you can go! Just go. All of you can go home now." Then he threw his sword down on the floor and walked off with his arm draped around Moses.

This small boy had figured out who Jesus really is.

Jesus is the King of hearts.

The once and future King was a King of minds and hearts. This King wanted his followers to do justice, love mercy and kindness and to walk humbly with our God until He returned.

Winston Churchill used to be First Lord of the Admiralty a position he had to leave in great sorrow some 25 years previous to the start of The Second World War. But when things began to look very bad, he was once again made First Lord of the Admiralty. Right across the British fleet by means of signals the message of hope went out Winston is back!

It is my faith that One day Jesus will be back!

And when he returns the old prophecy will be fulfilled:

He will speak peace to the nations;

And His dominion will be from sea to sea,

And from the River to the ends of the earth."