

“Christ the Kin”

Rev. Ken McGarry at The First Church in Stoneham, Massachusetts

June 9, 2024 - Third Sunday after Pentecost

[1 Samuel 8:4-20; 11:14-15; Mark 3:20-35](#)

Since Wednesday, there has been some new money in circulation, not here, but on the other side of the pond. New notes in the amounts of five, 10, 20, and 50 pounds were issued by the Bank of England, all featuring the likeness of Charles III, King of England, who took on this role when his mother, the beloved Queen Elizabeth II, passed away not quite two years ago. One of the perks of the job of England’s king is that he gets to have his face printed on all the money, including coins, which have already been trading pockets in England for a year and a half. Another perk is that he gets to boss people around, definitely not as much as former British monarchs did, such as George III, who was way too bossy for our liking, leading to our declaration of independence from him and his government back in 1776, but England’s monarchs and money remain influential in the lives of people around the globe.

Bossing people around and getting your face put on money have long been perks of different people’s rulers, from kings and presidents to czars and Caesars. And these are but a couple of the many ways that leaders of people have demonstrated power over those living in their dominion.

We heard a list of other ways kings and other rulers use and maintain their power in today’s reading from 1 Samuel. The prophet Samuel gave this list after the people begged for Samuel, God’s chosen prophet of the Twelve Tribes of Israel, to appoint a king to rule over them, so that they would be led, not by God as their ancestors had been, but by a human king, just as their neighbors were led by human kings. So Samuel warned them, “If you really want a human king to lead you in the style of human kings, be ready to have your children taken to serve in his army to fight his chosen wars, be ready to have some of your harvest taken away from you to feed that army, be ready for others of your children to be taken as slaves to serve the king and his army, and be ready for everyone and everything in your households to become his to employ however he chooses. Your money will actually be his money, and you will not your own will but his will. Is this what you really want?”

But the people of Israel wouldn't heed the warnings of their prophet, still crying out for him to give them a king, and so he did. Saul, who certainly looked like the king they dreamed of, being manly, tall, and handsome, was chosen and then anointed by Samuel as king, and monarchy in Israel began. And how did that work out? Well, you'll have to come back over the next few weeks to find out, but I'll give you a sneak peek now by telling you that the human kings of Israel did exactly what Samuel said human kings would do.

Fast forward many generations to the time of Jesus, when the people still had kings ruling over them, but not ones appointed by a prophet, however, but foreign kings, the Herods, who were installed by the rulers of the mighty Roman empire. The people once again longed to be led by their own king to rule over them, and so they cried out for a Messiah, or Christos in Greek, who would be their own anointed ruler, who would fight battles for them, conquer enemies for them, bring the wealth of the nations into Jerusalem, and grow their own glorious/oppressive empire.

Jesus had other plans. Indeed, he sought to establish a new realm, even as Rome and their Caesars and Herods reigned over people's bodies. Jesus was a Christ, who, instead of gaining power over others so as to take their stuff and enrich himself, would set people free from spiritual oppressors, no matter the political realities they faced. Jesus would bind up the spiritual "strong men" and demons that held power over people, powers that include what we might call today mental illnesses or behavioral or emotional disorders. Jesus' desire was not to grow wealth for himself, but give life to others, especially those living with spiritual oppressors. And so he worked all kinds of life-giving miracles to help people experience more of God's life within themselves. God's life growing in people and among people was what he called the Kingdom or Realm of God, and it is to this Realm of God, this realm of life, that we the followers of Jesus the Christ belong.

And we belong, no matter our family of origin or national heritage, as heirs of Christ, members of his own family; we who live in the new Realm of God are Christ's kin.

We are called as the kin of Christ to carry on the family tradition of working to give life that more of God's life would flourish on earth. We are called to keep up

his work of setting people free from spiritual oppressors and to become set free ourselves, more and more, as we do his work. We are also called to call rulers of all kinds to work for the well-being of all the people they lead and not to lead as life-sapping tyrants.

As a church, and as part of the capital c Church, we are called to grow an empire of love that leads to peace. We know that for 16 centuries now, since Roman Emperor Constantine embraced our faith and made Christianity the favored religion of the empire, the Christian Church has held great power over people, has become an earthly empire itself, expanding its reach and reign, in way too many of the ways of human kings, taking life from people rather than expanding life in them. Much of the work we have to do now is to fight against the injustices and harm that we have caused -- and too often are still causing -- in the lives of people.

Here, O friends, may we do the will of God in growing God's reign of life in one another, in ourselves, and in the communities we serve. Let us use all of our resources, especially the kind bearing the likenesses of monarchs and presidents, to grow God's realm of love. May we pass on this way of living and giving so that love and peace would grow in the world to our children and our children's children, that God's love, peace, and joy would flourish in the lives of those we love and throughout the earth. Amen.