

The King & You (20Nov16)
LuKe23:33-43

Colossians1:11-20

I'd like to begin introducing you to Alexa Rose, her parents Danielle and Ramon and their family, to get ready for her baptism and to orient us amid this Christ the King Sunday.

The odd connection is Alexa's grandmother Robin used to work with a man who became a church music director with whom I later worked. Tracing that forward some number of years, past Danielle's graduation party (which, if I recall, was one of Ramon's first visits to Wisconsin), beyond that, I had the privilege of officiating at their wedding, *fue la primera y la única vez que hablé español en una boda*.

Later, when Alexa's brother Leo was only a newborn, came the misfortune of presiding at the funeral of Danielle's little brother DJ. He was a delightful young man, with great care and a huge smile and the enormous tragedy of an addiction from which he couldn't escape in this life. A couple months after that, yearning for something positive, we celebrated Leo's baptism and how blessing continues in our lives. Danielle's father, Darrel, polished the baptismal font to sparkling. Yet to come, he and I have long talked about doing some icefishing together.

So there's a lot there. In one respect, that's the kind of stuff I'm honored to anticipate sharing with you, the big celebrations, and hopefully not too much tragedy, and all kinds of really regular moments and conversations and details.

Much larger and more important, though, than me as a pastor who happens to intersect with your life is the notion today that Christ is the King of this. As King or Lord, it means all of this falls within the realm of Christ, under the influence of his reign and his jurisdiction. He has

claim that extends over and around all of these moments.

In Alexa Rose's baptism is the declaration that nothing in her life will be separated from Christ or left outside of his blessing: her delights in her big brother and her smiles at her parents. Their efforts in so many ways to keep her secure—in providing a home and working long hours and throwing birthday parties and struggling against society when its racism or sexism or tribalism would threaten her wellbeing. Christ is in connections with grandparents and the guidance and care of her baptismal sponsors. All of this is held and nurtured by Christ.

And the promise continues far beyond what we know today, as she grows and meets new friends at school and discovers what her interests and passions and abilities are and as she begins making choices in her life (whether good or questionable, as all of us experience), on through years and decades.

We know this love and blessing of Christ was with Ramon and Danielle at their wedding, but we also confess with sure and certain hope that even death couldn't separate DJ from love and life and blessing in Christ Jesus. Christ as King must be amid threatening politics just as surely as icefishing. Today we identify that for Alexa Rose, through the thick and thin of it, through the sorrows we'd so much like to spare her and the triumphs we wish heartily for her, all the way to her final breath.

And then, even as today we're holding that very moment for a saint at the opposite end of life's spectrum and saying goodbye to Eileen Bolstad and commending her out of what our care could accomplish, releasing her fully into the eternal care of Christ's embrace, even in this moment of death we trust a promise of Paradise, that that last enemy will be overcome,

and the love and life and blessing in Christ Jesus will continue.

So as we trust this for Alexa and for Eileen and as we are able to hold onto it for ourselves, let's notice that in calling Christ the King, rather than it being a similarity to our typical rulers, we should hear a contrast. When we say Christ is King, we very particularly mean he's not like other kings, those who rule and control and disregard our lives for their own benefit or whims. This title, exemplified by one being tortured and executed on a cross, clearly is not trying to claim Jesus is the mightiest or the bossiest. He's not an authoritarian who always gets his way. He's not in a posh palace separated from the realities of our life.

Embodied in his crucifixion, Christ's Kingship is precisely exemplary in patient endurance for reconciliation, is with suffering, knowing the realities of life, not separated from those mundane and difficult details of your existence. He is a King who can relate to you or, to say it stronger, is related to you, your brother. (That also has the implications that you are entitled to your inheritance as part of the royal family! That focus will have to wait for another day, but please don't lose track of it!)

Another aspect of Christ being King also contradicts a common notion about faith and belief, and that's in what makes him your King. Just as it wasn't the ironic inscription on the cross that made him a King, neither was it by popular acclaim. It's not that you invite him into your life. It isn't the degree to which we attribute credit or how we pray or how we might try to claim favor. Jesus doesn't need your confidence in order to be King. His work and his reign aren't dependent on you or subservient to you like that. Though he's a servant King, he's not at your beck and call or waiting to do your bidding.

He—and he alone among all who would be called King—holds the role by divine right, in accomplishing God's will. In the language of Colossians, this extraordinary passage that portrays for us the fullest widespread concept of a cosmic Christ—a King of the universe—the thrones and dominions and rulers and powers are subject to him not because they're reporting for duty, but since his realm encompasses all.

So, in a huge distinction, while he doesn't cause sin, he must in the end still be responsible for it. Tragedies and addictions aren't attributed to him but neither are they outside of his realm. Even the worst corruption and decay and death, the nastiest and most virulent attitudes, the fiercest exclusionisms, the ugliest religious hatred, the most careless environmental destruction all fall within his redemption, are embraced by his healing love, are purged with the breath of resurrected life.

That's for us, too. For Alexa at her baptism and Eileen at her dying and for your lives overcome with worry, yet bound in his Kingdom, we have to confess it is vital he makes the promise good forever in baptism, because he's not the King we'd choose. He isn't the leader we'd like. He wouldn't win elections or popularity contests.

Imagine and sense, if you can, some of the despair for the women disciples at the foot of the cross and those men who looked on from a distance. Imagine and sense their loss, their disappointment, their worry. It would be much more appealing to have a glorious and triumphal ruler, who shattered the cross, uprooted its deadliness, saved himself, then swung out with a force-field that brought his opponents to their knees and protected his chosen ones and helped us always to escape the worst scenarios.

That's not Christ our King.

Our model is, yes, compassion and sacrifice and a long arc of justice. But the most important and most difficult word today of Christ as King is so countercultural you've likely hardly heard it in recent weeks: forgive. We may be surprised or even skeptical that it should be part of baptism for precious little Alexa Rose, but she'll need it, and Christ will still be for her then. And as it sets her on the course for receiving forgiveness, it also prepares her to be forgiving.

This is the challenging reconciliation that is at the heart of Christ's Kingdom and stands so starkly in contradistinction to all other authorities and rampant blame. "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." We are people striving to embody God's justice for our world in these days, but our identity is not just in trying to do better, much less in feeling better about what we're doing or more self-righteous. We are people challenged as we give our lives in sharing this prayer: Father, forgive. Forgive their selfishness. Forgive their prejudice. Forgive their violence, their greed. Forgive their hatred. Forgive their incompetence or ignorance, that they don't know what they're doing. Forgive their disruptiveness and destructions. Forgive their incivility and immorality. And me, too, forgive me.