

Lord, Just a bunch of sheep and goats here waiting for your Word this morning. Give us ears to hear you and eyes to see you in the here and now. Amen.

(Blow my Trumpet...) Hear ye, Hear ye... Today is Christ the King. A triumphant feast day. Puff up your chests. Stand up Tall. Put your hands in the air.... Feeling triumphant yet?

No... yeah me neither. The repudiation of white supremacy that I was waiting for earlier this month never materialized. The Comradery and collaboration that arises when people band together in an effort to save innocent lives is happening locally, but not nationally. At home, the squeeze of child-rearing in a time of great existential threat without the normal pillars of support is proving to be harder than any parent, including myself could have imagined. And on top of all that – I'm just really sad that the threat of Covid is doing its best to condition me to be on guard against stranger and friend alike. Somedays I don't recognize myself.

Triumphant? Please! I'm as far away from triumphant, as one can be. I've heard stories, anecdotes. I know I'm not alone in this. The feeling of triumph alludes you too.

To those of us who recognize in this Christ the King Sunday, a cruel irony - celebrating the triumph of God in the midst of an especially broken world, allow me to point out just one thing. We're getting it all wrong. We're getting what *makes* Christ *the King* all wrong. The world around us may teach that triumph looks regal, majestic and perfect, and you may think Christ the King mirrors that teaching but look closer - Jesus himself never espoused such a worldview.

In the Gospel passage today, Jesus tells the story of a King on a throne, who scholars, readers and early hearers all seem to agree is a metaphor for God. In the parable many of us fixate on the throne and the judgment administered by the King and equate that seat and those actions as the pinnacle of power. We view this story through our own cultural lens – where power is concentrated in the hands of the powerful who are far removed from the powerless. And God becomes a King in our own image. A King, like other kings. Primarily obsessed with power and triumphing over all enemies.

Some days I want a God like that King. An all mighty God with the power to vanquish all enemies with the snap of fingers.

But that's too simplistic for Jesus. Jesus tells a nuanced story of the Divine. A story that finds precedent all the way back to Abraham when God was so insecure they put Abraham up to a love test so impossible, any other parent would have failed in an instant. Here we must contend with what may be for some an uncomfortable possibility – that God, the God that spoke to Abraham, and the God who still speaks to us today, is a God that while powerful, is also incredibly vulnerable.

A lot of Christian writing talks about the Holy One as omnipotent – all powerful, omniscient – all knowing, omnipresent – everywhere all the time. What if I were to tell you, that yes...while this all may be true, that doesn't seem to make God any less vulnerable.

Don't just take my word for it – let's look again at today's Gospel reading. In the text you see that the King on the throne expresses great vulnerability. What compels the king to make his judgments is the king's own experience of and vulnerability to human choices; "for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me...." In powerful imagery Jesus is trying to teach us is that the All-powerful God is indeed moved, affected and influenced by our actions. It is a mistake to think that God is far removed, indifferent and unaffected by the people we become and the choices we make. Ours is a vulnerable God who feels the consequences of the choices we make every day.

Does this make you uncomfortable? To contemplate a vulnerable God? Well may I suggest, it's because we have been led to believe that vulnerability is a flaw, rather than a profound gift. About a decade ago Brene Brown emerged on the scene and quickly shook up the landscape with her groundbreaking research on vulnerability and shame. Rather than paraphrase her – let's just hear from her directly on what she has to say about vulnerability.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=psN1DORYYV0>

(Minutes 3:57 – 6:04)

We may have historically been under the impression that Christ the King was all about victory with no vulnerability; but dear ones that's just false. Jesus weaved a story today that shows just how inextricably linked power and vulnerability are. In this morning's clip Brene reminds us that vulnerability is the price one pays to take important emotional risks. My impression is that God is not risk averse. It is risky to be the God of so many people; we're tricky, fickle and selfish and yet God puts it all on the line and pursues us anyway.

If you take anything away today, may it be this - if vulnerability is good enough for God, It is certainly good enough for you and I. In this season of incredible hardship, sadness and anxiety – I invite you to lean into whatever hurt feelings you may be suppressing. It's ok. Your strength is not measured by your ability to keep sadness at bay. Your strength is your ability to see the sadness for what it is, and to speak tenderly to your soul. This Christ the King remember that triumph doesn't just come when the hardship is over. Triumph exists right now, as we see the hardship for what it is, and remain resolute, with courage to see and name things as they are and not look away. We will get through this together, One vulnerable day at a time. Amen.