

Christ Episcopal Church, Valdosta
“Your Most Gracious King” (Ezekiel 34:11-16)
November 22, 2020
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In the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Today is one of my favorite Sundays of the year, the last Sunday of the liturgical calendar: Christ the King Sunday. Jesus Christ is not only your Creator, not only your Redeemer, not only your Savior, not only your Sustainer, not only your Healer, not only the One who loves you more than you love yourself, not only Emmanuel—“God with us, God with *you*”—who has always been with you even when you have felt most alone; Jesus Christ is also Your Most Gracious King. Scripture identifies Jesus Christ as the King of kings and Lord of lords (Revelation 19:16). This gives us hope in the present because we hope in a future under the eternal rule of Your Most Gracious King—as we prayed for the collect for today:

Almighty and everlasting God, whose will it is to restore all things in your well-beloved Son, the King of kings and Lord of lords: Mercifully grant that the peoples of the earth, divided and enslaved by sin, may be freed and brought together under his most gracious rule” (*The Book of Common Prayer* 236).

We worship a restoring God who does not just restores some things but all things, everything, by reconciling it all through the precious blood you’re Your Most Gracious King shed on Good Friday, as Paul wrote in his Letter to the Colossians:

For in (Jesus) all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross (Colossian 1:19-20).

There comes a point in your life—or perhaps several points in your life—where the only thing you can do is cry out to Your Most Gracious King, for help—cry out to Your Most Gracious King to reconcile the things in your life that need to be reconciled, to make peace in the areas in your life where you need such peace the most.

In today's passage from the Old Testament prophet Ezekiel we see the compassionate heart of Your Most Gracious King for the lonely and the lost:

For thus says the Lord God: I myself will search for my sheep, and will seek them out. As shepherds seek out their flocks when they are among their scattered sheep, so I will seek out my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places to which they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land; and I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the watercourses, and in all the inhabited parts of the land. I will feed them with good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel shall be their pasture; there they shall lie down in good grazing land, and they shall feed on rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I will make them lie down, says the Lord God. I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak (Ezekiel 34:11-16).

In other words, Your Most Gracious King is also the Good Shepherd who seeks and saves the lost and lonely (John 10:11 and Luke 19:10). Along these lines, I am going to juxtapose two illustrations—one from an acclaimed television series on Netflix, the other from one of the best double rock albums ever.

In the most recent season of the brilliant Netflix series *The Crown* there is much focus on Lady Diana, Princess of Wales, particularly the challenging dynamics involved with her relationships not only with her husband Prince Charles but also with the others in the royal family. Although on the surface you would think Lady Diana had it all as a princess in the British monarchy, but beneath the surface, she was utterly lost, utterly alone. In one episode Lady Diana is alone in her room (again) as the royal family gathers for a lavish Christmas celebration. Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh and husband of Queen Elizabeth II, senses the difficulties with which Lady Diana is struggling and checks in on her. "I've come to see if you're all right," he says. "It can be a rough bunch in this family. I'm sure on occasion you must feel like, well, let me ask, what does it feel like?" Lady Diana decides to drop her mask of having it all together and responds, "A cold frozen tundra...and I see a dark loveless cave with no light, no hope anywhere, not even the faintest crack."

A moment later she looks into Prince Philip's eyes and continues, "Although we are both outsiders who married in, you and I are quite different." Philip nods his head, "Yes. I can see that now. You're right to call me an outsider. I was an outsider the day I met the 13 year old princess who would one day be my wife." Then he steps closer and adds, "After all these years I still am. We all are. Everyone in this system is a lost, lonely, irrelevant outsider, apart from the one person, the only person that matters (referring of course to his wife, Queen Elizabeth II). She's the oxygen we all breathe, the essence of all our duty. Your problem, if I may say is you seem to be confused about who that person is."

Now the other illustration...the epic 1973 album *Quadrophenia* by The Who recounts the story of a disillusioned young man named Jimmy who feels disconnected from his parents, misunderstood by his psychiatrist, and overlooked by people all day long in his job as a bell boy. Even Jimmy's girlfriend has walked away, with his best friend no less. Like Lady Diana, Jimmy feels utterly lost, utterly alone. In the final song on *Quadrophenia* Jimmy has gone to Brighton Beach and swum out to a rock in the sea, and from this rock Jimmy cries out:

Only love can bring the rain that makes you yearn to the sky
Only love can bring the rain that falls like tears from on high
Love, reign o'er me, rain on me, rain on me...
On the dry and dusty road the nights we spend apart alone
I need to get back home to cool, cool rain
I can't sleep and I lay and I think the night is hot and black as ink
Oh God, I need a drink of cool, cool rain
Love, reign o'er me, rain on me, on me, on me

Some of you may relate to Lady Diana in that Netflix episode—on the surface you got it all but beneath the surface you feel lost and alone, or as Prince Philip put it, "an irrelevant outsider." Or some of you may feel like Jimmy from *Quadrophenia*: disconnected, misunderstood, overlooked, or experiencing the heartbreak of having a loved one walk away. On this Christ the King Sunday the good news of the gospel is that Jesus Christ, Your Most Gracious King, understands what you are going through, cares about what you are going through, and is present to offer you grace and peace where you need it most.

You see, Jesus gets it. Even at his birth Jesus was treated as an outsider, and throughout his earthly ministry was often dismissed by the establishment as “a lost, lonely, irrelevant outsider.” Throughout his earthly ministry he was overlooked and misunderstood. And yet again and again and again Jesus demonstrated that he is not only Your Most Gracious King but also your Good Shepherd, as he continued to give grace to outsiders, continued to be present with those utterly lost and utterly alone, continued to give peace to those who needed it most.

Just as Ezekiel had prophesied centuries earlier, God in Christ made good on his promise to search for the lost sheep, to bind up the injured lost sheep, to bring the lost sheep back home—in short, to *restore* the lost sheep, every single one, including you, because again, God is a restoring God.

And out of love Jesus died on the cross for all of the lost and lonely sheep, died on the cross to restore all of you because God is a God “whose will it is to restore all things” in your life.

And even now the Risen Jesus remains the King of kings and Lord of lords (Revelation 19:16) whose love reigns o’er the universe, whose love reigns o’er the lost and lonely, whose love reigns over every outsider, and whose love reigns o’er you.

So on this Christ the King Sunday may you experience anew the “cool, cool rain” of the love of “the one person, the only person that matters”—Jesus Christ, Your Most Gracious King.

Amen.