FPCU **November 22, 2026** **Rev. Dr. Tina Blair**

What Kind of King?

Text: Mark 10:35-45

Today is Christ the King Sunday. We often picture the Triumphant Christ on the throne, with the subdued world below him when we hear these words, don't we! Christ, the King!

Clearly, that's what James and John, sons of Zebedee, thought! They could just picture the kingdom that Jesus would be the king of – a kingdom of power and might, but a wonderful kingdom with all the baddies, like the Romans, gone, and Jewish law installed. Let's be understanding – that is all they had ever experienced. So their expectations were based in their reality.

In that time, as you know, the kings and especially the Roman emperor, were all-powerful despots. They had an enormous amount of power, backed by ruthless, efficient, trained military legions. Rome occupied many of the Mediterranean countries, oppressing whole populations in the name of the "*pax romana*," the Roman peace. It imposed severe taxes, used forced labor and military conscription, and – worst of all for the Jews -- required worship of the emperor as a God. The emperor, his court and his puppet kings, such as Harod, lived sumptuously, and controlled enormous wealth. When I was visiting Israel, I could not believe the number of Harod's baths we saw, located all over the country – those large marble-pillared, covered pools of hot water and cool water – all over this dry, desert-like country. Imagine the pomp of the court and the pain of the people! Picture the amount of power they had!

Not like today, right? Hmm…
On the other hand,we just witnessed – not that long ago – the pomp around the coronation of the British King Charles III and Queen Camilla, although they have much less power than earlier rulers. Through today's instant news on social media, we see the power and pomp of dictators around the world on every continent, the palaces owned by Putin in Russia, the military marching for Kim Jong Un in N Korea, not to mention the pomp of our own leaders. We have just been through the ugly power struggle of an election. We understand political power and its possible consequences. We know the way it can be used to help and to serve the people – or to hurt and oppress them. And we worry – even if our person won. What will they

do with their power? I think we **do** understand biblical kings and their power as we live in these troubled times – at least somewhat.

However, our king, Jesus, did not care about power -- throughout his ministry, he made it clear that he had no interest in earthly thrones, temples, military legions, water-rich palaces, misplaced worship. Or maybe I should say that Jesus had no interest in the human, political understanding of power. The power he taught about was the polar opposite of our understanding: Jesus spoke of the power of small seeds, a pinch of yeast, of one fine pearl, of giving a couple of lowly pennies. He spoke of power as finding the lost, forgiving the debtor, of inviting in those who live under the hedges. He himself gave up the greatest power that exists, as the Apostle Paul wrote to the Philippians, in Chapter 2: *"Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness…. And became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross" (Phil 2:5-8).*
Jesus gave up the power of being God, the power of creation itself, the power of life to become one of us!

I have found the much-acclaimed novel, <u>The Life of Pi</u> by Yann Martel, very helpful for understanding how radical this is. (I may have shared this with you before because it's a favorite of mine). The best parts of the story are not in the movie, by the way, if I remember correctly. This story is about an adolescent boy in India named "Pi." Pi is a deep lover of God, raised to be a devout Hindu. One day he encounters the faith of Jesus Christ through conversations with a gentle priest named Father Martin**.** After hearing the story of how God sent the Son to rescue and atone for human sin through His own death, Pi asks, "How can this be true of a god? "Love," says Father Martin.

Pi goes home in disbelief. He returns the next day, arguing that a God should not be so weak and powerless. The stories of <u>his</u> gods tell how gods hold the universe in their mouth; they stride across the earth and the heavens and kick the evil ones to the netherworld in 1-2-3 steps. Pi tells the priest that
"…that is God as God should be. With shine and power and might. Such as can rescue and save and put down evil.
This Son, on the other hand, who goes hungry, who suffers from thirst, who gets tired, who is sad, who is anxious, who is heckled and harassed . . . - what kind of a god is that? It's a god on too human a scale, that's what. . . This Son is a god who spent most of His time **telling stories**, talking. This Son is a god who **walked**, a pedestrian god – and in a hot place, at that – with a stride like any human stride, the

sandal reaching just above the rocks along the way; and when He splurged on transportation, it was a regular **donkey**… What kind of a god is that? What is there to inspire in this Son?" *(my emphases)* "Love", says Father Martin.
"You can keep your sweaty, chatty Son to yourself," says Pi. But he keeps asking questions. And Father Martin's answer continues to be the same, "Love."
"That," says Pi, "is how I met that troublesome rabbi of long ago… I couldn't get Him out of my head. Still can't… And the more I learned about Him, the less I wanted to leave Him."

Our king, with all the power of God in him, gave it all up to be a sweaty human being, enfleshed like we are. As a human being, he learned to understand life the way we do, experiencing all the ups and downs, joys and sorrows that we have. He identified with the homeless, having no "nest" into which to lay his head. He identified with the sick and the outcast. He chose to become, in many ways, one of "the least," one of "the last," rather than "the first." What kind of king is that?

In today's time, natural disasters are increasing, wars are expanding, massive amounts of people are dying, dictators are refusing to negotiate. In this post-election time -- no matter what party we voted with, whichever candidates won on a city, state or national level -- we are worried about the consequences. In this time, we often feel discouraged, hopeless and powerless. So this is the time to remember what **Jesus** thought of our human conception of power. It is time to exercise the kind of power that Jesus did. It is time to remember the power of small seeds, a pinch of yeast, of one fine pearl, of giving a few lowly pennies. It is time to remember the power of finding the lost, of forgiving the debtor, of inviting in those who live under the hedges. It is the power of being last, rather than first; of being servant rather than master. It is time to celebrate Jesus' kind of kingdom.

First, as we rethink what our power is, let's celebrate **"seed power,"** the seeds of love. We **are only able** to do what our location, our time, our abilities enable us to do. We only **have** to do what Jesus calls on us to do. Often, it's the small loving seeds we plant, those small actions faithfully and regularly undertaken, that will eventually yield fruit. Where would the community be without the caring phone calls, cards and visits to the sick, the feeding of the hungry, the collection of clothes and school supplies, the meals and breakfast bags to the homeless, and so on and so forth? Where would the voiceless be if the church did not speak for them? **In these years ahead, these ministries will be all the more important and essential for the survival of those society considers "the last."** I am so proud of what churches do for their communities! And if we can, we will need to multiply some of these seeds of love, compassion and care. In the coming new year, we can explore what is

FPCU called to do in addition to its current ministries. What current seeds will need to be especially nurtured and what new seeds planted?

What will it take to nurture and support seed power, Jesus' type of power in his kingdom? It takes **"community power."** It takes a church community, a gathering of the faithful, of Jesus' disciples – every one of you! By gathering, we learn the stories by which he taught us. By gathering we support each other tenderly, with empathy and compassion. By gathering, we cross political lines, rejecting the world and the nation's divisions and offer each other the honor of respect. We work to understand each other and to join in a common cause of doing justice, loving mercy and walking humbly with our God, as the prophet Micah urged. We labor to unite together and have "the mind of Jesus," as Paul wrote. This is a challenge – but we can do it, for Jesus will lead us. Such unity will give more power to whatever seeds we each plant and nurture. We have come together this year, and I am seeing this happening – it's so exciting! This is what Jesus' kingdom is all about! In Jesus' kingdom, his Holy Spirit fills us, unites us and guides us – not at all like divisive earthly kingdoms.

One way to expand our community power is to join in with other community helping and justice groups. This is why our Session (Board) is forming the Reach group. Some volunteers have stepped forward to lead and find ways both to reach out to other groups and to share the Gospel message outside these walls. They could use a few more members. Is Jesus calling you?

And finally, we are called to exercise **"prayer power."** Prayer power comes from taking time out, breathing deeply and calmly, and remembering that Jesus is with us, here, listening. Prayer power is letting Jesus speak to us, comfort us, be with us consciously. As I said last week, in prayer, we can be honest, examining our own actions, anxieties, regrets. We can ask for forgiveness, for strength, for insight, for the next steps to take. We can draw on his courage and wisdom. Through prayer power, we can be grounded in Christ's love and compassion.

Our king went all the way in rejecting our notions of power – our king chose to die just as we do, to walk with us through death itself. Our King chose Love over human-style Power. Pi is very shaken by the story of Jesus and his death. He says:
"I'd never heard of a god dying… divinity should not be blighted by death. It's wrong… It was wrong of this Christian God to let His [incarnation] die…. Why would God wish that upon Himself? Why not leave death to the mortals? 'Love'. That was Father Martin's answer."

Jesus' power comes from his incredible Love, seen in his life, his death and resurrection, and his teachings. This is the kind of King we follow. **This is the power we are given.** In God's kingdom, power is found in small seeds of compassion, in the unity of community, in times of prayer. In God's reign, in God's kingdom, the last, the least, will be first. **That's definitely something to celebrate, this week of Giving Thanks! Amen**!

Mark 10: 35-45

James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to him and said to him, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." And he said to them, "What is it you want me to do for you?" And they said to him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory." But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" They replied, "We are able." Then Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized; but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared."

When the ten heard this, they began to be angry with James and John. So Jesus called them and said to them, "You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."