
Who is This King of Glory?

An Evensong meditation by the Rev. Canon Lauren Holder
The Last Sunday after Pentecost: Proper 29, Year A (The Reign of Christ)

Whenever we come to this particular Sunday of the year, the last Sunday of Pentecost, the Sunday some like to call “Reign of Christ” or “Christ the King,” there is a certain tune that immediately gets stuck in my head. You know me, or most of you do, and based on the stories you’ve heard me tell over the years you must think there is an endless soundtrack of hymns and Sunday school songs and camp songs and Broadway tunes and sacred music playing in my mind at all times. And you would be correct. Most of the time I can keep the music to myself, but today is one of those days where I have to share.

The tune is one I sang in daily chapel services growing up at All Saints Episcopal School, though it’s not in our hymnal. Still, you might know it:

*The king of glory comes
The nation rejoices
Open the gates before Him
Lift up your voices*

*Who is the king of glory
How shall we call Him?
He is Emmanuel
The promised of ages*

As a child, I enjoyed how the song would get a little faster with every verse, until the organist could barely keep up.

In recent years I discovered that Stephen Colbert, professional funny guy and acclaimed Sunday School teacher, once sang and danced to this same tune. I will not dance for you today, but I do commend the video to you, should you need an extra dose of joy.

The reason I think this song is worth mentioning is because of the question and response it contains: Who is the king of glory, how shall we call Him? He is Emmanuel...

Emmanuel. God with us. That’s who this king is. This king is *with us*.

I think that’s the crux of today’s Gospel reading. On the surface, it’s not an especially uplifting piece of scripture to hear. This king will come and separate the sheep from the goats? Well any time we start talking about who’s in and who’s out, I get a little uncomfortable. And the goats or the folk that are “out” are doomed to eternal punishment? What happened to the God of mercy—a God abundant in steadfast love?

That God is still in this story. There is mercy and love in this story.

Because look at who inherit the kingdom. It’s the folks that care. It’s the folks who show love and mercy to anyone in need of it.

Want to enter the kingdom of God? In today’s story, there’s no special creed or belief or set of words you have to adhere to... no skill or level of knowledge you have to attain... nothing to earn or accomplish... there’s simply this invitation to see who is hurting around you and care for them. See the hungry, thirsty, lost and

lonely, see the sick and all in need... see and care.

Because this kingdom is ruled by one who sees and cares. This king stooped down to be incarnate in the person of Jesus, this king humbled himself to see and care in the most profound way possible.

Who is the king of glory, how shall we call him? He is Emmanuel—God with us. God with us enough to see and care for us. And when we see and care for others the way God sees and cares for us, the kingdom draws near.

But when we don't see the need around us, and we don't care for the needs around us, neither can we see the kingdom. And if we can't see Christ in our neighbor, neither can we see Christ's kingdom to enter it.

A life of not seeing and not caring for others is a life devoid of love and mercy. That does sound a lot like eternal punishment.

So hear today's Gospel reading, and listen for the invitation it offers us.

Don't hear it as a checklist of what to do to get into heaven. Feed the hungry: check. Clothe the naked: check. No, that's not what this is. You will not discover the kingdom of God in solving the world's problems. That's not even the example God sets for us. The king of glory is not "God fix us" but "God with us."

Emmanuel. God with us.

So hear the invitation to do what God chooses to do—hear the invitation to get close enough to see the needs around you and care for the needs around you. Let *God with you* help you to *be with* others. That "being with" is the kingdom. The seeing, caring, being in relationship—that's the kingdom.

Emmanuel. God with us. You will know it when you see it. *Amen.*