

Now, may I speak in the name of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Today is the Feast day of Christ the King. It's the last day in the church's calendar, our new year begins next week. I'm delighted that we had a great wedding in church yesterday and that lends a festive occasion for today. It's also the anniversary of Mother Rebecca's ordination today. Is that 16 years? Very good.

It's a great day for musical directors. They can choose any one from a number of great hymns and anthems about God as King. I find it a much harder day for preachers, the reason being that there's so little material in the New Testament to go on that talks of Jesus as King. In fact, in the Gospels, Jesus never claimed that title. He never refers to himself as king. The nearest he gets is when Pontius Pilate says to him at his trial, "Are you the king of the Jews?"

Jesus says, "You say that I am." That was the closest he got to claiming that title for his own. And of course, we see in the Gospels too, when Jesus was crucified, there was that inscription over the cross. "This is the king of the Jews." But that was ironic. They were mocking Jesus when they wrote that. So why would Jesus never claim the title as king in his lifetime?

Actually, I don't think that's a very difficult question to answer. Jesus resisted the title of king because he knew that it was a title associated with military and political power, and Jesus wasn't into that. He didn't want to confuse people. He didn't want them to think that he was a figure who had any political or military aspirations. If he was a king, he was a different kind of king and it was a type of kingship that the people wouldn't have even begun to understand. He was a king whose throne was a cross. We see behind the image behind the altar, our crucified king wearing his crown.

But we mustn't go on to conclude that Jesus was a king with no power. He was no weak monarch. He had no problems owning and showing his power.

He revealed his authority over nature by calming the storm. Saint Luke talks about Jesus having the power of the Lord with him to heal. And after he cast out spirits, the crowd we're told, wondered, what kind of power is this? The crowd, Saint Luke says, tried to touch him as his power was coming from him to heal. And you remember that story of the woman who reached out from the crowd and touched the hem of Jesus's garment. We're told that after she touched him, Jesus felt the power go from him. So he knew he had power.

The crucified king was not a normal kind of king, and the power of the crucified king was not a normal type of kingly power. It was different but strong. Saint Paul described it as a power made perfect in weakness. It's this unusual, unique, different kind of power that King Jesus shares with his disciples, in fact, with all his people. Hear again, how our epistle that we've heard today begins. Saint Paul writes, "May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power." Do we feel strong? Do we know that strength that comes from Christ's glorious power? We're a people of power, but maybe we, especially as Episcopalians, tend not to be comfortable thinking like that and thinking of ourselves as people of power. We are wary of power language. We're sensitive to abuses of power, be it in the church or elsewhere. We're mindful of the dangers of colonialism, crusades, inquisitions.

But we shouldn't shy away from the power that is part of our Christian inheritance, which is given to us in Christ to claim. Saint Paul knew how to embrace that power and he encouraged the church in Ephesus to discover, and I quote, "the immeasurable greatness of His power for those who believe." And here's a very challenging verse from Paul's letter to Timothy, which I came across this week. Saint Paul chastises those who hold onto the outward form of godliness but deny its power. I took that, when I read that this week, as a real challenge. I don't want to be a person who holds on to the outward form of godliness and denies its power. And I don't want St. James to be a church that does that either. So I want to spend the rest of

my time offering three areas where we can know and exercise the power of King Jesus.

The first is the power to be transformed. We hear a lot about self-development, self-realization, self-fulfillment. And that's not the same as the process that takes place as the Holy Spirit of Jesus works within us to transform us. Saint Paul told the Romans not to be conformed to this world, but to be transformed. The verb's in the passive. Don't transform yourself but be transformed. Open yourselves up to the Spirit of God to work in you and within you. Saint Paul writes in Ephesians, "Now to him, who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish far more than we can ask or imagine."

Some people here know that soon after I arrived in La Jolla, I was very proud of my new bike and I worked hard at conquering Mount Soledad. On one attempt, I was nearing the summit, feeling very proud of myself. Unlike Prince Andrew, I was sweating profusely. But no matter. The summit was within reach. And then I heard a gaggle of young voices, giggling and joking behind me. I pushed on. The voices though, got louder. I assumed they were in some truck. They got closer. And then half a dozen young kids just swept past me on bicycles. I pedaled hard. I tried to keep up but I couldn't. My self-esteem was shattered. Then I realized that chasing them was futile, as they were on electric bikes. They had a power source unavailable to me.

We too have our power source outside us on which we can draw. We are recipients of God's spirit and the spirit of Jesus makes a difference in our lives. We too can be transformed. It is the power at work within us that is able to bring about that transformation. Yet many of us still push on, struggling under our own steam. It's as ridiculous as trying to ride up Mount Soledad on an electric bike without turning on the electrical power supply. Why would we do that? Why would we seek to live our Christian lives without drawing on the power of God's spirit within us to transform us?

Secondly, we have the power to serve. King Jesus did not use his power to dominate. He came to serve. "The Son of Man," he said, "came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many." In our epistle from the Book of Colossians, we began at verse 11. In verse 10 the verse before, Saint Paul encourages his readers to bear fruit in every good work, which, in the original Greek, forms a parallel with a phrase in the verse with which our reading began, where he writes, "Be made strong with his power."

He's linking there the power to serve and God's power within us. We are made strong to serve. Our weak efforts can be transformed into something powerful. And there's a great example of that in the Gospels. Do you remember that story of the feeding of the 5,000 where the young boy brings up five loaves and two fishes? That's all he had to offer. And yet Jesus blessed what he had to offer and by some miracle fed 5,000 people. The weak offering was transformed by Christ's power.

Finally, I want to say something about the power of the Bible. Many of us have taken up Rebecca's invitation this year to read through the whole Bible in the course of the year. I'm sure that those of you who are doing that with me have noticed some strange bits, bits that we never have read in church on a Sunday.

For instance, we've just finished Job, a very long book full of very odd bits of Job's friends trying to offer platitudes to Job. They were no good to Job, but I can't see their particular relevance to us either. There are stories in there that feel distinctly old-fashioned, definitely un-PC. And at first glance, we might think, "This is a very strange book to have as our authoritative text."

It doesn't have the feel of a comprehensive textbook. It'd be so much easier if there was an index. We could just go to the back and look up any particularly relevant verse. We can't find all the answers easily in this book. And yet, many generations of Christians have found this to be a powerful book, a transformative book. We talk

about it as God's living Word because this is the book through which God has chosen to speak to his people by his Spirit. As we turn to it and read it carefully, many people, many people here, over the centuries have found God addressing them through this text. That's what makes it powerful. The power is not immediately obvious. It doesn't fit with other concepts of powerful books, but it has a power all of its own that comes from God's Spirit, bringing the words to life, speaking them directly into our heart.

So in conclusion, I invite you, invite us as a church, to embrace Christ's kingly power. Let's look to be a people of power who exercise that power in the same way that our King Jesus did, a power to be transformed and a power to serve others and to be a transforming presence in the world.

Amen.