

Sunday, November 24, 2024

The Last Sunday after Pentecost: Christ the King

Festal Evensong

4:00 pm

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A Sermon by
The Rev. Mark Schultz

on

Daniel 5; John 6:1-15

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A Starker Contrast

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

There could hardly be a starker contrast of kingship.

On the one hand: Belshazzar. Arguably the most powerful king of the most powerful empire of the early sixth century BC.

He's hosting a feast. Thousands of people, the nobles, the wealthy, the people of substance
Tastemakers and influencers, pundits and pop stars of the day

A glistening occasion: tables groaning under sumptuous rich food,

Wine flowing like water, an excess of opulence and flash such as the world rarely sees,

Of which even a Nero an Elagabalus

or the most scandalously corrupt Medici could scarcely dream;

A spectacularly consumptive debauch

That would likely make any one among this world's locust-plague of billionaires

Secretly blush with shame or envy, who could tell.

And the climax of the whole bacchanal: an act of breathtaking blasphemy—

Belshazzar orders the vessels of the Jerusalem Temple, all that remains of the temple, really

Vessels seized years ago in the desolation and ruin and of the whole southern kingdom of Judah,

He orders these vessel brought before the assembled guests

to dazzle and amuse them with their beauty

As if that's what beauty was for: to be consumed.

Holy things treated like common,

used not for worship of the Eternal Sovereign Lord of the Worlds

But to serve a proud man's dissolute wantonness.

They're his now, he can do with them or with anyone or anything what he likes.

Belshazzar: the epitome of the proverbial man

who knows the price of everything and the value of nothing.

Belshazzar: lord and king.

Belshazzar: who rules the world and holds it all and feasts on it all and wastes it all.

All that tawdry glitter. All the fading faded glitter.

Gone now. Lost now. Earthly splendor turned to dust.

On the other hand: here's Jesus.
He's also hosting a banquet.
Thousands of people.
Hungry people, everyday people. Lots of people.
Acres of grass
A vast sheep meadow, perfect for grazing, plenty for everyone:
The Shepherd is host.
It's almost Passover
And people thinking: Oh I know this scene
Didn't Moses bring the people into a wilderness like this?
Didn't Moses feed the people in a wilderness like this,
With bread that came from, where again, heaven?
Jesus sees the crowds, smiles, asks his friend Philip:
"You see this crowd? Oh dear: how are we to feed this lot."
He knows—he wants to see if Philip knows.
And he doesn't, not at first.
"We can't," he says.
But one says, Andrew says:
"It's not like we don't have anything.
Here's a boy with lunch, and he wants to give it to us—
But what is that amidst so much need?"
And Jesus smiles again, says, "Thank you, Andrew.
You don't know it, but you've opened a door
This little boy has opened a door.
He's giving me what he has.
Not what he doesn't have.
Little as it is,
You just have to offer it.
And I can make it enough."
And he takes it. He gives thanks for it:
Bread and fish, one boy's little lunch.
And for thousands and thousands of people.
It is enough.
The common things of earth: suddenly uncommonly wondrous.
And a whole host of people, caught up in the wonder
Revealed as a people for whom the wonderful was wrought
The everyday suddenly: all holy.
They want to make him, Jesus, they want to make him king
He doesn't want to live in a palace.
The life of a profligate Belshazzar holds no appeal.
He wants to live in their hearts.
He sees their very lives as the habitation most worthy of him
He wants to show them how deeply precious and beautiful they are to him.
He wants to give himself completely to them.
He'll go so far as to offer them his body and blood
The very substance of his life
To nurture and heal them: He'll say, "I am the bread of Life. I am the Feast that satisfies."

He'll give it to them for free—he himself will pay whatever price he can to give his life to them,
To give his life to us
Whether we're more Belshazzar or sheep, he'll meet us where we are
Whether in a palace or the open air,
He will compassionate us all, and he will transform us all:
If we let go of the gaudy tawdry glitter of earthly splendor,
If we give up our death-dealing,
If we lay before him our lives, our brokenness, our sin, our human death
If we open our hearts, even just a little
He will take what we give,
And he will flood our lives with a heavenly glory;
He will give us his divine life
He will live, the King of Love
In us.

There could hardly be a starker contrast of kingship.
Belshazzar, and Christ.
Who will rule in you?

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.
