

## Getting to Know Jesus, the Christ

Nov 23, 2014

### Christ's Commonwealth

Ps 100 & John 18:36

(13, 784, 797, 625)

I have a friend who is a devoted monarchist.  
At least once a week, he posts some obscure fact or event  
about the British royal family on Facebook.  
Those are posts I always quickly scroll by.  
I have no interest in the subject whatsoever.  
I suspect that is true of most of his other friends.  
Yet his devotion is unshakeable.  
He continues to post these things,  
with a knowledge about their details that intrigues me,  
even if it doesn't attract me.

I suspect a lot of people think of Christianity  
and all this talk about the Kingdom of God  
and Jesus Christ as King  
in the same way.  
It's left over from an earlier time.  
It's really not all that important.  
It's a fascination for a weird group of devotees.  
It's something we've grown beyond,  
a form of loyalty and government that we've grown out of.

I must admit, I share some of that thinking.  
Just as I find my friend's modern monarchism eccentric,  
all of this 'King' and 'Majesty' language in Christianity  
feels a little too much like tyranny and authoritarianism.  
I see Christianity as the opposite of that,  
as a prophetic protest against that use of power,  
whether it be by old-style monarchs, new-style politicians,  
business barons and corporations,  
or independent, charismatic church pastors.

That's why I translate the kingdom language of the Bible  
into commonwealth language for our own time and place.

I'm not trying to ignore or deny the testimony to God's reign and rule  
throughout the Scriptures,  
all this talk of the Reign of God and the Kingdom of God,  
with Jesus, the Christ, as Prince of Peace and King of Kings.  
But I find that the Spirit draws my attention constantly  
To the nature of that Reign, the Kingdom,  
and I think that quality of community and relationship  
is best represented in our own time and place  
by the idea of 'commonwealth.'

Isaiah, you will remember, is Jesus' favourite prophet.  
The same can be said for Paul,  
whose letters and encouragements to the early churches  
we will focus on throughout 2015  
in our Memorize and Ponder texts.

Here's how Isaiah describes  
the righteous reign of the coming King  
in chapter 9, verses 2b-7:

*The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light;  
those who lived in a land of deep darkness— on them light has shined.*

*<sup>3</sup> You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy;  
they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest,  
as people exult when dividing plunder.*

*<sup>4</sup> For the yoke of their burden, and the bar across their shoulders,  
the rod of their oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian.*

*<sup>5</sup> For all the boots of the tramping warriors  
and all the garments rolled in blood  
shall be burned as fuel for the fire.*

*<sup>6</sup> For a child has been born for us,  
a son given to us;  
authority rests upon his shoulders;  
and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,  
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*

*<sup>7</sup> His authority shall grow continually,*

*and there shall be endless peace  
for the throne of David and his kingdom.  
He will establish and uphold it  
with justice and with righteousness  
from this time onward and forevermore.  
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.*

You will hear echoes of this passage  
in the Advent hymns and Christmas carols  
we will sing together over the next few weeks.

It is a vision of a commonwealth in which tyranny is banished  
and peace with justice is the norm.  
All peoples live in peace, filled with the joy of justice.  
This is what God is zealous about  
and God's zeal for this commonwealth will make it happen.  
That's the vision Jesus, the Christ, came to realize,  
the commonwealth Jesus, the Christ, came to inaugurate.

As people who have been drawn together  
in a common loyalty to the authority of this strange King, this odd Lord,  
we are invited to be citizens of and ambassadors for  
this peaceful and just way of being together.

It is not the way the world thinks.  
It is a way of being together that does not emerge  
from the political agendas and machinations of this world,  
whether they be the religious and imperial powers of Jesus' times  
or the economic and ideological powers of ours.  
It does not use worry, wealth, and weapons  
as ways of imposing its tyrannical rule.

It is headed by a Father, a Friend, and an Advocate,  
a Healer, a Helper, a Counsellor.  
It's charter is love – love God, love neighbor, and love self.

So, I think it best to see this Kingdom of Christ  
as a commonwealth of God's people throughout the world.

We are the vanguard of God's ultimate reign,  
the model of how people live in peace with justice.  
It starts with how we respect ourselves as God's beloveds,  
and how we relate to each other in this church community,  
and how we reach out into this neighbourhood in love,  
and how we witness to and work for peace with justice  
in every dimension of our lives in this world.

Jesus is right.

His kingdom is not **from** this world.

But everything he said and did points to another important truth.

His commonwealth is **for** this world.

May the Holy Spirit make us loyal citizens and ambassadors  
for the commonwealth in everything we do.

***Now to him who by the power at work within us  
is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine,  
to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations,  
forever and ever. Amen  
(Eph 3:20-21)***