



# SERMONS AT SAINT MARK'S

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THE VERY REV. STEVEN L. THOMASON, DEAN AND RECTOR

THE LAST SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST, CHRIST THE KING, NOVEMBER 26, 2023

EZEKIEL 34:11-16, 20-24; PSALM 95:1-7; EPHESIANS 1:15-23; MATTHEW 25: 31-46

## FORMING THE SECOND LINE WITH CHRIST THE KING



Some of you may know that last weekend Kathy and I were in New Orleans for the wedding of our godson. It was a grand affair, as weddings go, but we discovered that New Orleans' weddings take the festive celebration up several notches. The festivities

span several days, with a series of soirees that lead up to the wedding service, which is rather brief, fulfilling its statutory and ritual purposes in short order, then the Second Line forms.

Second Lines are a quintessential New Orleans art form. You may know the tradition connected to funerals, where the procession of mourners forms behind the jazz band to parade through the neighborhood. What begins as a somber occasion turns to revelry, with dancing to the upbeat music. Everyone dances as they move into life without their loved one present. It is sacred work.

Brought from West Africa by slaves, Second Lines in the New Orleans tradition served both functional and spiritual purposes: the parade through the neighborhood invited folks to contribute to the cost of the funeral, while also serving to remind the assembly that despite death and the impulse to despair in the wake of it, hope leads us on to something new.

What I didn't know until last Saturday was that Second Lines form at weddings too. The newlyweds carry ornate parasols and form the head of the procession with the band. The wedding guests are given white handkerchiefs as they form the second line and dance through the neighborhood following the drumbeat and trumpet, and spinning parasols seen up ahead. Neighbors come from their houses and join in the street dance while police stop traffic. It is meant to be a blessing of presence and great joy, even while the functional purpose is to get the crowd out of the wedding hall to reset it for the party to ensue from there, going deep into the night.

And yes, the party went well into the night...

Now if all this feels a bit like cultural appropriation, as it did to me last Saturday, however fun it was, I will share that I was told in no uncertain terms by Black artists in New Orleans that they do not see it as such. We all need such rituals offering hope and blessing, Black musicians lead the way, and it is communal, gathering up our common humanity in ways that celebrate that. They said we are invited into such Second Lines for a purpose.

Which got me to thinking: whom do we choose to follow?

Here on this last Sunday of the Church Year, we observe Christ the King Sunday. It is not an ancient tradition, arising only as a quasi-feast day in the church calendar about a century ago, but the image of king as the one whom people follow is ancient and universal. Indeed, it is archetypal, which in Jungian terms is to say it is present in the collective unconscious of all human beings. Archetypes form the common foundation for the experiences of all human beings, and the image of king is one of the masculine archetypes innate to the human experience, regardless of gender.

The mature king archetype is centered, decisive, blesses and protects, provides order and integrity to the milieu of life in their realm, and they inspire creativity in others. I hope you hear in this a certain generosity of spirit and stewardship of the whole.

The tragically misguided version of king which all too often finds expression across history and in current events is one who is

either immaturely narcissistic and in desperation turns tyrannical, or is weak to a fault and becomes paranoid or even delusional about their loss of power.

Violence becomes the pressure valve in the face of such shadows. History is strewn with wars with origins in such misanthropic distortions of the king archetype. Empires rise and fall, as do institutions off the whims of such shadowy frailties. The Church is not immune from such degradations either.

But none of this suggests we should jettison the image of king altogether, as if we could anyway. The archetype, however named, will be with us, and in us.

Deirdre Good wrote a book several years ago entitled *Jesus: The Meek King*. The notion of meekness is largely foreign to our modern lexicon, or we simply equate meekness with weakness, an anemic version that has little hope of leading, let alone others following.

I don't think that's who Jesus was. No, Jesus the meek king was centered, decisive, blessed at every turn, providing order and hope and integrity to the life of those wearied by the powers and principalities of his time. He offered a different way that resonated deeply. And in the quintessential art form that is the Paschal Mystery, death and resurrection are held together by his kingly creative power that invites all into the procession of hope, to

follow him into a new realm, a new vision of life. There is surely generosity of spirit and stewardship of the whole in this invitation to follow him, but never denying the vagaries of life that are ever-present.

But there is an even more radical twist to this kingly archetype of Christ. Fleming Rutledge was one of the first female priests ordained in the Episcopal Church. Not one of the Philadelphia 11, but the second cohort after that, in 1977, and she is still regarded as one of the finest preachers of our time. Citing the gospel passage this morning, she once wrote of Jesus our king: "The Son who 'sits upon his glorious throne with all the nations gathered before him' (Matt. 25:31-2) is the same one who, at the very apex of his cosmic power, reveals that the universe turns upon a cup of water given to the littlest ones in his name."<sup>ii</sup>

...the universe turns upon a cup of water given to the littlest ones in his name."

I want to follow that kind of king, and I bet, more often than not, he will look different than me, she will speak regal grace into our midst in a language not necessarily our first, they will show up in our lives when we need them most, and in it all, we will recognize them and their invitation to meekness amidst the Paschal Mystery of life, and we will dance with the king, and know it to be right, and good and true.

**Matthew 25:31-46** [Jesus said, "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and

*you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’ Then he will say to those at his left hand, ‘You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ Then they also will answer, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?’ Then he will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.’ And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”]*

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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.hnoc.org/publications/first-draft/music-makers-sound-second-line-explained>

<sup>ii</sup> [https://www.christiancentury.org/article/2011-07/royalty-stoops?code=Q3Rc288EjAsX6bv8sKYY&utm\\_source=Christian+Century+Newsletter&utm\\_campaign=55aa453b96-](https://www.christiancentury.org/article/2011-07/royalty-stoops?code=Q3Rc288EjAsX6bv8sKYY&utm_source=Christian+Century+Newsletter&utm_campaign=55aa453b96-)

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