

Our Inheritance: Being Filled to Fill

Daniel 7:1-3,15-18

Psalm 149

Ephesians 1:11-23

Luke 6:20-31

Do we have any Downton Abbey fans here this morning? What about anyone who enjoys medieval or European history? One of the things that monarchies have going for them, that Americans do not, is an understanding of royalty. When American colonists threw off their English oppressors, they left us a deep appreciation for independence and freedom. No one is despoiling that legacy! We prize equality, however imperfectly it plays out in civic life. There is something, however, about the titles and family identities associated with royalty that tend to frame the way royals behave in the world. Royals have particular manners, they carry themselves and move through the world differently, because they have an identity that sets them apart; they are special, and they know it. Largely they choose to live in a manner which supports that identity, marking them as part of an elite family, honoring their predecessors and preserving traditions for the future. Their kingdom matters to them, and they see themselves as integral to its preservation.

Americans don't have the same understanding of a royal kingdom mindset, but the stories of Downton, or King Arthur, or princesses and dukes offer us a window into a way of life Jesus spoke a lot about. Not regarding fancy castles and fine clothes, but a way of seeing ourselves in relation to our royal lineage and how that acts in the world. Today we hear Paul teaching about our inheritance with the saints. To understand his message, it's helpful for us to imagine the Old World where royals literally wore crowns. Their lives were shaped by the dignity and responsibility they felt for upholding their royal family and caring for their kingdom. For Christians, our inheritance in Christ is part of a royal line whose power, glory, and greatness are meant to serve and permeate the world

This morning is the celebration of All Saints Day. This is a festival meant to celebrate our participation in a royal dynasty, honoring our ancestors, the saints who have gone before us, and our shared identity with them as the Body of Christ, the Great Communion of Saints.

Today's Psalm illustrates a joyful celebration of God's faithful people, praising their king. They danced, made music, and enjoyed festive singing. These people aligned themselves with their king and swore to protect the kingdom against the invasive threats of enemies. Likewise, Daniel understood God's people as members of an enduring kingdom. He called them "holy ones" meaning set apart. Members of God's kingdom have an identity and allegiance that is specific. Daniel, like the Psalmist, understood that the kingdom would encounter threats, but that its security and destiny are ultimately not in question. Both authors use the language of kings and kingdoms to express a community of people with a single family legacy, a unified, dignified, and eternal purpose.

In a world where we don't wear crowns or project familial spiritual DNA in a visible way, it can be easy to forget this inter-connectedness that we share. So, when Paul talks about it in his letter to the Ephesians, he prays for enlightenment beyond physical sight. His prayer is for "the eyes of 'our' heart", our internal understanding of who we are and whose we are. He knows that once we genuinely grasp our identity as heirs of the kingdom of God, we will begin to behave congruently with the riches of our inheritance.

Unlike earthly royalty, our participation in God's Kingdom, is not about securing its riches exclusively to be enjoyed by a select few. Rather, the kingdom of God is meant to fill the whole world. The inheritance we receive is an identity of hope, power, and authority to fulfil God's will. According to Paul, the more we come to understand our identity, the more fully we will live into that reality. And the more we live our royal identity in this world,

the greater the world will be blessed through us because God's power through us is limitless.

If we're not careful though, human thinking can trip us up regarding our royal identity. Humans think royalty and power are expressed through strength. But, in God's Kingdom, according to Jesus, the glory of the royal identity is expressed through weakness, poverty, and humility. It is the poor to whom the kingdom of God belongs. Our royal bearing is expressed through our love, our alliance with the outcasts, our willingness to lay aside our own comfort to support the comfortless. It seems upside down because human thinking believes the dignity of royalty expresses itself through its ability to distance from neediness and grief. But the heirs of God's kingdom demonstrate power by bending down and using it to elevate and protect the powerless.

When we fast-forward Jesus' story to the end of his life, we find out just how unpopular this message was. Living out his royal identity led Jesus to the cross. So Jesus warns us that people won't understand it. In today's reading Jesus explains that members of his kingdom will be hated, reviled, cursed, stolen from, and struck. As far back as Daniel and the Psalmist, God's people have understood that God's kingdom will face the threats of competing kingdoms. We know that living according to the royal identity that Jesus modeled has always been costly.

As members of God's Kingdom, we do have the power of the Holy Spirit, limitless power to accomplish god's work. But that work will not be completed during our earthly lives. The saints from the beginning of Christendom have suffered because of their alignment with their royal identity as Children of God. They died in hope, trusting the power that raised Jesus from the tomb would be sufficient for them to live out their calling in this world, and carry them safely into the next. Our royal inheritance is not a guarantee of ease in this life;

rather, it's really a guarantee of suffering. Following Christ leads to the cross. And when we give up our lives for God's kingdom, making sacrificial choices, choices that cost us, our confidence is in Jesus' words "Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven".

This Greek word for heaven indicates the realm of God and the angels, the place the saints inhabit while they await their resurrected bodies. This is the place just beyond what our eyes can see, inaccessible to us, but not distant. Today, we celebrate our saints, the ones who enjoy their rewards and rejoice in heaven, who watch and pray and wait for us. We honor them by choosing lives that honor the sacrifices they made, by living according to the power of our shared inheritance. Together we worship with them as one body, one family joined in a royal lineage.

May we be a people who live according to our identity as heirs of God's royal family.

And now, because it is good to remind ourselves of things we so rarely discuss, let us turn (to page 7 in the bulletin)--- in our prayer books to the catechism on page 862. Please read the people's responses beginning with the third question:

Reader Why do we pray for the dead?

People **We pray for them, because we still hold them in our love, and because we trust that in God's presence those who have chosen to serve him will grow in his love, until they see him as he is.**

Reader What do we mean by the last judgment?

People **We believe that Christ will come in glory and judge the living and the dead.**

Reader What do we mean by the resurrection of the body?

People **We mean that God will raise us from death in the fullness of our being, that we may live with Christ in the communion of the saints.**

Reader What is the communion of saints?

People **The communion of saints is the whole family of God, the living and the dead, those whom we love and those whom we hurt, bound together in Christ by sacrament, prayer, and praise.**

Reader What do we mean by everlasting life?

People **By everlasting life, we mean a new existence, in which we are united with all the people of God, in the joy of fully knowing and loving God and each other.**

Reader What, then, is our assurance as Christians?

People **Our assurance as Christians is that nothing, not even death, shall separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.**