

## King That Serves

XK-11, Nov. 20, 2011  
Mt. 25:31-46

Rev. Dr. C. E. Hagen  
Memorial, Afton

Dr. Seuss wrote of a turtle who decided to be king of a pond,  
and bullied his fellow turtles to serve his own desires.

*On the far-away Island of Sala-ma-Sond,  
Yertle the Turtle was king of the pond.  
A nice little pond. It was clean. It was neat.  
The water was warm. There was plenty to eat.  
The turtles had everything turtles might need.  
And they were all happy. Quite happy indeed.*

*They were ... until Yertle, the king of them all,  
Decided the kingdom he ruled was too small.  
"I'm the ruler," said Yertle, "of all that I see.  
But I don't see enough. That's the trouble with me.  
With this stone for a throne, I look down on my pond  
But I cannot look down on the places beyond.  
This throne that I sit on is too, too low down.  
It ought to be higher!" he said with a frown.  
"If I could sit high, how much greater I'd be!"  
What a king! I'd be ruler of all I could see!"<sup>1</sup>*

And he then begins to command other turtles to make him a tower.

Kings rule.

Kings command.

Kings control.

Kings conquer.

Since "the dawn of man" we have had rulers, kings who assert authority.

Feudalism is the resulting system of dominance and control.

In the end, one person owns it all,  
one person controls production and distribution,  
one person decides,  
one person reigns.

Feudalism is a system where a person takes over what is *rightly God's*.

Feudalism is a controlling system that has usurped God's rule and reign.

Yertle the turtle

was self-serving,  
abusing others,  
using others for his own gain.

Feudalism, human kings who lord over others,

usurp God Almighty's rule  
and corrupt what it means to be king.

Then came a period in our history called the European Renaissance  
that dismantled feudalism.

Skepticism was one element of the Renaissance.

Skepticism that gave rise to modern science in the 17<sup>th</sup> century,  
also influenced politics, giving rise to democracy.

Skepticism questioned the authority of kings,  
pointing out the mistakes and flaws of those in power.

Democracy was the eventual response to feudalism.

---

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Seuss, *Yertle the Turtle and Other Stories* (NY: Random House, 1950).

In democracy no king decides for subjects.  
 Instead, subjects themselves decide their laws and their leaders.  
 Democracy is the best and most natural form of government invented by society.  
 In theory at least, it respects the common person  
 and distributes power and authority to every citizen.  
 It works.  
 We have become accustomed to it.  
 Then we in America took an unconscious step further.  
 We brought democracy to religion.  
 We brought the values of democracy to bear on our religious practices.  
 We brought to religion the value that  
 each person has *the right to decide for themselves*  
 what they believe  
 and how they practice their faith.  
 We democratized religion;  
 and along with overthrowing earthly kings we dethroned the King of kings.  
 We unconsciously applied the democratic principle  
 to that of choosing for ourselves *who will be our God!*  
 And there the trouble begins.  
 We choose whether to believe that there is a God,  
 as if we create God.  
 We choose what we want from God.  
 We choose what we want to believe about God.  
 We choose which scripture to believe as it suits our preference.  
 We choose for ourselves who will be our pastor  
 and grumble if he doesn't turn out how we want.  
 We choose what we want from church and leave if we don't have our way.  
 God and church have become victims of democracy.  
 We all have become Yertles,  
 kings unto ourselves, demanding that our own preferences prevail.

There can be only *one* king.  
 There can be only one king all others obey.  
 There can be only one king all others serve.  
 Earthly kings exercise domination, power over others.  
 They impose their will and force obedience.  
 Kings with power command and dictate.  
 But such power is over-rated.  
 Power of this sort is largely ineffective.  
 Power of this sort can only act with threats or violence,  
 and are dependent on instruments of war to enforce their will.  
 Power of this sort cannot count on the hearts and will of people.  
 Power of this sort does not impress me.  
 It is over-rated and largely ineffective.  
 We see in Syria today, and in Libya, Egypt and Tunisia recently,  
 that dominating power,  
 power that imposes and demands and forces and controls  
 is weak and defensive when it ceases to serve.  
 This is also true within families.  
 Dominating, controlling power is ineffective in winning the hearts and devotion of others.  
 Domination requires violence to succeed  
 and that violence is only weakness.  
 Domination, abuse, violence, control are only *weakness*.  
 Strength, genuine strength, is not about asserting one's will over another,  
 but comes from serving in such a way that another benefits.

Jesus exposes power's shortcomings and overturns the tables.

Jesus puts the powers and dominions in their place.

Power is a second-rate virtue.

On the cross, Jesus shucks the trappings of power

to demonstrate *responsibility* for making the world right.

Greater than power to dominate

is responsibility to make right.

*In Jesus we have a king*

*who does not execute those who disobey his commands,*

*but instead takes their place at the execution.*

In Jesus we have a king

who *does not* exploit the weaker to enrich his coffers,

but sees even the weakest as his very treasures

and *enriches them* from the stores of his kingdom.

In Jesus we have a king

who *does not* fear immigrants or aliens,

but *welcomes* the stranger as his newest friend.

In Jesus we have a king

whose core identity is that of a *giving God*,

who gives richly to his people,

who lavishes life with beauty and bounty,

who generously gives up his own claim to right and instead forgives,

who prefers mercy over rightness,

who prefers compassion over justice,

who prefers service over command.

The kind of king God creates

is Jesus who serves and loves and gives to make another better.

The world's kings control and collect.

God's king serves and gives.

So, how does that kingdom work?

Does such a utopian place exist?

Yes, it exists right here, right now.

It is not as an organized government we are used to seeing.

It is ordinary people practicing the ways of Jesus in most ordinary ways.

We have read in Ephesians (2:22-23)

*... he [God] has put all things under his feet*

*and has made him [Jesus] the head over all things for the church,*

***which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.***

In these verses we hear the extraordinary claim

that *the church is the body of Christ.*

If we wish to see Jesus in person

we come to this church, Memorial Lutheran Church.

This church is the physical, tangible presence of Jesus!

People committed as a community called Memorial Lutheran Church

gathered and acting in the name of Jesus,

is the physical presence of Jesus.

How we live together,

treat each other,

care for one another

struggle to understand each other in our disagreements,

and generously give great doses of patience, grace and benefits of doubt,

is how we express our identity as Jesus.

*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..."*  
*Then the righteous will answer him,  
 "Lord when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food..."*

They truly do not know.  
 They are unaware of this mercy shown  
     because it is a natural part of who they are,  
     they naturally and unconsciously care.  
 In such God's kingdom appears and God's kingdom reigns.  
 Notice that it is not some efficient organization running smoothly,  
     and it is not some wildly effective program winning members,  
     and it is not a happy place where everyone's expectations are met,  
     that marks God's kingdom come.  
 God's kingdom is not an institution or program or organization.  
 God's kingdom is people caring.  
 God's kingdom is people patient with one another.  
 God's kingdom is assuming the best of another.  
 God's kingdom is giving of oneself so that another is better.  
 God's kingdom is generously giving  
     with the expectation that God's giving never runs out.  
 God's kingdom is seeing Memorial Lutheran Church  
     as the fullness of all that Jesus is.  
 Everything that Jesus is, Memorial is.  
 There is nothing more to God.  
     All of God is here at Memorial.  
     All of God's kingdom and rule is already present as us.  
 We already are what God promises.  
 What some see as problems or issues or serious defects  
     are nothing more than where the very Spirit of Jesus is present and acting.  
 Scriptures prove and eyes of faith see  
     that even our flaws are gifts  
     for in those flaws God's Spirit intervenes and redeems.  
 It is in the flaws where God acts most clearly.  
 That is the kind of King we have,  
     one who intercedes in people's needs.  
 That is the kind of people we are made,  
     those who intercede in people's needs.  
 And so we find that we have inherited the kingdom planned by God.  
 We have become God's kingdom come to earth,  
     not one that dominates or controls,  
     not one that takes and possesses,  
     but one that serves and gives  
     and finds that when we do, we never lack.

Amen.