

## Sermon on Kings, Baptism and Living Stones, May 7, 2023

I got up early to watch the Coronation yesterday. I've always had a soft spot for royalty. Don't worry. I've heard all the arguments against the monarchy and many of them have merit. But I still have a soft spot for them. And yesterday, watching King Charles being crowned, and listening to the service and the oaths and the Archbishop of Canterbury's sermon, and watching as that heavy crown was set on his head, I felt a bit sorry for him.

If Charles was ever under any illusions that being a king gave him the right to do whatever he wanted, that service would have set him right. But I don't think he was. I think he knew, from watching his mother, how difficult it was. Already he's had to stop giving his opinions about things like the environment, because he has to be non-partisan. Several times in the service he says, "I do not come to be served but to serve." And the Archbishop reminded him of the true King, Jesus Christ, whose throne was a cross and his crown made of thorns, and who laid down his life for his people. That's a lot to live up to.

When I was a kid in elementary school, we used to play a game. Actually, it was seriously politically incorrect and I'd be very surprised if kids played it today. I hope they don't. There was a little hill in the playground, and one of us would get to the top and chant, "I'm the king (or queen) of the castle and you're the dirty rascal." And then other kids would try to push the self-proclaimed king or queen off and get to the top themselves and they would chant it: "Im the king of the castle!" Mostly it was an excuse to push and shove each other and give ourselves a moment's glory. Did you play that, too?

I think that's what a lot of us tend to think being the boss is all about. You get to throw your weight around and tell other people what to do. And not have to do the things you'd rather not do, like housework! If I was the Queen, believe me, I wouldn't be doing any more housework!

Well, I don't suppose the King does housework but there are a lot of other things he has to do, that I would much rather not have to do. Like be in the public eye all the time. Whenever we step into a position like that, whether it's the King or being the head janitor, or being a priest or a warden or a godparent, or even being a Christian, there are definitely some privileges attached to the position. But there are also a lot of responsibilities. The crown is made heavy for a reason. To remind the King that he bears a heavy responsibility. When we're ordained, all the priests who gather around to lay hands on us with the bishop push down a bit, so we will feel the weight of responsibility.

Today we are going to welcome those who are seeking baptism, and their parents and sponsors. They're going to make some promises and the congregation is also going to make a promise, to pray for them and set them a good example and help them grow in the love and knowledge of God. So we will have the responsibility to keep those promises. And to help each other keep them. Until those kids grow up. That's a big responsibility, and that's why we need help doing it. That's why it takes the whole church.

In his letter today, St. Peter invites us to come to Jesus, our foundation and cornerstone, and, like living stones, to let ourselves be built into a spiritual temple. He invites us to be living stones in God's living temple. I know the Juteaus know a lot about foundations. That's their work, laying foundations. You want to make them strong and solid, so you can build on it and your building won't fall down.

For us Christians the foundation stone of our lives is Jesus Christ, his life and his teaching, his person. And you can't get a more solid foundation for your life than Jesus Christ. No matter what happens, come hurricane or earthquake, that foundation will never shift or crack. If we base our lives on Jesus, we don't have to worry. Doesn't mean we won't get the hurricanes and earthquakes – look at St. Stephen, whose martyrdom we read about today. But the foundation stays firm and we are ultimately OK.

Christ is our foundation and we are part of the church, the Body, that is built on that foundation. Each one of us becomes a living stone in that living church, when we are baptised. And as long as we rest in Christ and keep him as the foundation for our lives, we won't go wrong.

Peter also invites us to become a holy priesthood, a royal priesthood, God's own people, set apart to proclaim the wonderful things God has done, for us and for all people. When we are baptised, we join in this royal priesthood, we become God's own people, we become a part of his Body here on earth, the body through which he still acts in the world.

When we are baptised, we make a number of promises which kind of flesh out what that means. Like seeking and serving Christ in all persons, working for justice and peace among all people, respecting the dignity of every human being, working to safeguard God's creation, proclaiming the Good News of God in Christ. In the baptismal preparation that is starting now in this parish, and also in the confirmation classes that will start soon, we will be talking about what all these things might mean for us and how we can manage to do them, in our lives. Because they're not easy, actually.

But here's a cheat sheet for you: the answer is Jesus. In the gospel passage today, Jesus is getting in some last minute instruction the night before he dies, and he tells the disciples that he is the way, the truth and the life. It is through Jesus that we come to God. It is through Jesus' Spirit in us that we find the strength and commitment and faith to follow him. It is through Jesus that we find the grace to do the things he did, and even greater things. It is by Jesus' Spirit that we know what to ask in his name. It is only with Jesus' help that we can follow Jesus.

What St. Peter and Jesus, too, are inviting us into is the Body of Christ. When we are baptised, we live in Jesus and Jesus lives in us. That's what these parents are asking for for their children: that they may be made a part of Jesus' body, here on earth, part of the Christian community whose job is to follow Jesus' example and continue his work. That's a big responsibility for them and their godparents and parish sponsors. Because they're going to promise to live that out in their own lives and teach their children to follow their example. And the rest of us are going to promise to help them and to pray for them.

I have a vague memory when I was a small child of my parents getting dressed up one afternoon and taking us all to a strange building, big and drafty, but kind of peaceful, with mellow light from the windows. We were there for my baby brother's baptism. It was a church. So the parents and this man I didn't know, in odd clothing, were doing something at the back of the church. We kids played among the pews. No one else was there. That's all I remember. My parents didn't take me to church and I didn't know much about it. The only times I went as a kid, besides for my own baptism and the younger kids' baptisms, was when I joined Brownies and Guides and we went once a year for church parade.

But when I did start to explore the Christian faith, many years later, I found in it something truly wonderful. I found this invitation from Jesus into loving relationship with him. And I said yes. Following Jesus isn't easy. But it's so amazingly worthwhile. In the movie series *The Chosen*, John the Baptist asks Jesus if he's willing to do God's will. Jesus answers, "I'm ready at all times to do the will of my Father. But that doesn't make it easy." This is true. The life you are seeking for your children and godchildren isn't easy. Well, honestly, no life is easy. But it is so worthwhile. There is no better life, truly, than following Jesus.

And when I started to go to church, curious about what it was all about in spite of my Dad's off-putting comments, the people there welcomed me. They were my role models. They helped me learn. The priest taught me confirmation classes (at 15 I was too old for the regular classes), but the whole church helped me. They picked me up and drove me to things. They took an interest in me. I expect they prayed for me. Because it takes a whole church to raise a child in Christ.

This is why we've started using parish sponsors. These are people from the congregation who are sort of parish godparents. They are there to be mentors, to answer questions, to make sure these children are always included and welcome, and to pray for them. That's in addition to the godparents the family chooses. You can't have too many people helping you in your Christian walk.

Today we are welcoming these children and their parents into baptismal preparation. They will learn a bit more about what it is they're wanting to be part of. They will have opportunities to share experiences, to ask questions, and to make friends. And to strengthen their own life in Christ. I ask all of you to pray for them, so that when they come to baptism, they will be ready to make the promises with their whole hearts and enter more deeply than ever before into their own lives in Christ, while bringing their children into the church as well.

And I will say to you what the Archbishop of Canterbury said to King Charles yesterday in his sermon. He said that you can't do any of this in your own strength, but you can do it with the help of God. When God calls you to something, God will empower you to live it out. It is only in the strength of God that a person can be King or priest or a baptised member of the Body of Christ. I pray that as God has called all of us to follow him, so he will keep us following faithfully and joyfully all our lives.