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Christ Reigns
Peace, Seattle
November 22, 2009 epk
John 18:33-37

MAN BORN TO BE KING

In his book The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe,[1] C. S. Lewis tells the story of four children: Peter, Susan, Edmund, and Lucy, who stumble upon the strange, wonderful, and dangerous world of **Narnia**.

Narnia is full of fantastic creatures both good and bad—giants and ogres, fauns and dwarfs, and animals who talk. As the story progresses the children find themselves caught up in a centuries old battle between the forces of good and evil.

Representing all that is good and right and noble and true in Narnia, is Aslan.

> **WHO IS ASLAN?** asks Susan as the children sit at table in the underground home of the Beavers, on their first day in Narnia.
>
> **ASLAN?** says Mr. Beaver, WHY DON'T YOU KNOW? HE'S THE KING. HE'S THE LORD OF THE WHOLE WOOD.
>
> **IS HE A--A MAN?** asks young Lucy.
>
> **ASLAN A MAN!** says Mr. Beaver sternly. **CERTAINLY NOT. DON'T YOU KNOW WHO IS THE KING OF BEASTS? ASLAN IS A LION---THE LION, THE GREAT LION.**
>
> **IS HE---QUITE SAFE?** asks Susan.
>
> **SAFE**? replied Mr. Beaver, **WHO SAID ANYTHING ABOUT SAFE? 'COURSE HE ISN'T SAFE. BUT HE'S GOOD. HE'S THE KING, I TELL YOU.**

Opposing the forces of good is the White Queen, who is really the evil White Witch.

With a wonderfully tasty candy confection—**Turkish Delight**—and the promise of future glory as King of Narnia, the White Witch lures the third child, Edmund, into her web of deceit.

The evil Witch's power to induce temptation is far beyond Edmund's ability to resist. *Entire rooms full of Turkish Delight* seem to be within his grasp, not to mention the promise that he'll be able to boss his older brother, Peter, around.

So Edmund gives in to the White Queen's demands, becoming a traitor to his siblings and an unwitting accomplice in her twisted plot to rule Narnia forever.

But Aslan is not surprised. He is well acquainted with the ways of the White Witch, and with human weakness. Aslan uncovers her plot to seize the children, and rescues Edmund just at the moment the Witch's knife is poised to take his life.

Edmund is safe now, and deeply sorry for what he's done, but someone has to pay the price.

Meeting with Aslan under a momentary truce, the White Witch reminds him and the others of the "deep magic" of Narnia, set down from the Dawn of Time.

[1] C. S. Lewis, *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe*. © C. S. Lewis 1950 Pte. Ltd.

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"YOU KNOW THAT EVERY TRAITOR BELONGS TO ME AS MY LAWFUL PREY," says the Witch, "THAT HUMAN CREATURE IS MINE. HIS LIFE IS FORFEIT TO ME. HIS BLOOD IS MY PROPERTY."

She is right, the deep magic must be obeyed. There is no way around it.

But the life that is taken will not be Edmund's.
Instead, Aslan the King, pledges his own life in exchange for the young boy's life.

It is he, not Edmund, who will be bound and gagged;
He whose blood will be spilled at the place of sacrifice—the Stone Table.

This powerful story causes us to ask:
What kind of King would yield power in such a way?
What kind of King would renounce authority and lay aside his rightful throne?
What kind of King would offer his own life in the place of another?

Unlike most festivals of the church year, the origins of CHRIST THE KING SUNDAY are modern rather than ancient.

Motivated by the rising tides of Fascism, Nazism, and Communism, **Pope Pius XI** instituted the FEAST OF CHRIST THE KING in 1925 on the 1600th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea.

Against the backdrop of these movements which a few years later would send the world into violent convulsions a second time, the Feast of Christ the King posed—and answered one simple question:
Who shall finally reign?

With the likes of Mussolini gaining in popularity, Pius thought the time was right to refocus on the one who is ultimately the sovereign over the lives of individuals and nations.

We mark Christ's reign today to remind us that it is he, first, whom we serve.
And because his sovereignty is supreme, all the other allegiances we bear—whatever their origins or claims upon us—are secondary.[2]

As we confess in our creeds, "Christ will come again to judge the living and the dead,"
***and when that time comes*, the birth pangs we heard of last week will become full-fledged labor, and Christ will serve as midwife at the birth of a whole new world.**

The prophet Daniel evokes that image as he brings us to the throne room of God where the heavenly court is in session. There, "One like a Human" stands before the throne of The Ancient One and is given glory and honor, an everlasting dominion, a kingship that shall never be destroyed.

Contrasted with this vision is the scene from John's gospel where another court is in session; not in heaven, but in the Roman praetorium, where Jesus appears before Pontius Pilate.

Pilate represents the seemingly omnipresent and omnipotent Roman imperial empire and appears to be in charge of the proceedings. Jesus stands before him, a prisoner betrayed by one member of his own circle and denied by another.

[2] See article by Carey Gardiner Mack in *Currents in Theology and Mission*, October 2005.

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ARE YOU THE KING OF THE JEWS? Pilate asks.
WHAT HAVE YOU DONE TO BE HANDED OVER BY YOUR OWN PEOPLE?

MY KINGDOM IS NOT FROM THIS WORLD. Jesus replies, IF IT WERE, MY FOLLOWERS WOULD BE FIGHTING TO KEEP ME FROM BEING HANDED OVER, BUT AS IT IS, MY KINGDOM IS NOT FROM HERE. FOR THIS I WAS BORN, AND FOR THIS I CAME INTO THE WORLD, TO TESTIFY TO THE TRUTH.

How far from our expectations is the behavior of this King.

- Instead of showing his power, he is vulnerable.
- Instead of rallying his troops, he submits.
- Instead of making demands, he gives testimony that will lead to his own death.

If we've been following the gospel's plot to this point in the story, then we know that as Jesus stands accused before Pilate, a greater justice is being worked out in this courtroom.
Then we know that Jesus is not the only one on trial.

Today as we eavesdrop on this conversation between Jesus, the accused, and Pilate, the judge, we sense that Pilate himself and somehow, we too, are on trial here.

- The sticky residue of Turkish Delight is on our fingers and our lips.
- Our quest for power and control over others, our pursuit of self preservation at all costs;
- all that is selfish about us, all that judges others for not being who we want them to be; it is all exposed here.

We are all traitors of one sort or another, whether our motive is fear or greed or a taste for things we cannot resist. **And it is not we, but HE who has taken on himself the price for our betrayal.**

Who is this King we meet before Pilate? The king that gives himself up for traitors.

For this is why God sent his Son to take on flesh and live among us—so that the world, that we, might find safety, healing, wholeness—salvation—through him…
…so that relationship with God, at the deepest level of our souls, would be restored.
…so that a new world and a new way of living in that world, would emerge from the waste and shambles of human sinfulness.

Court is in session, and someone will pay the penalty.
Jesus has offered himself in our place, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

PRAYER: Lord Jesus, we cannot repay you for what you have done for our sake. But we can live our lives with gratitude, and by our living show the world what you have made us: your very own daughters and sons, water-washed and spirit-born, called at font and table to bear your redeeming love to all the world. Remind us today of who we are, and send us out as blessing bearers to your whole creation. Amen.