



## Christ the King Sunday (B)

### Five Acts

[RCL] 2 Samuel 23:1-7; Psalm 132:1-13 (14-19); Revelation 1:4b-8; John 18:33-37

Happy Christ the King Sunday! Here we are on Christ the King, on the very cusp of Advent. Part of the supposition of this day is that everyone might have a working knowledge or direct experience of kings. In this modern age, very few of us have any experience of life under kings. Many of us may think of kings as a charming vestige of a bygone era at best, or a damaging holdover of patriarchal oppression at worst. So, we could be forgiven for not wanting to observe this day or for eschewing kingly language altogether.

Sometimes though, when we try to correct or expand our language for God, we end up throwing the baby out with the bathwater. By the end of this sermon, I hope the hearer will see Christ the King in a new light, even if the kingly language is removed.

First, imagine a night out on the town. Remember those? Imagine going to a play. It's a one-act play; all the action, character development, and story happen in a few scenes. It is short and it is satisfying. Being a one-act play, character and story must necessarily be brief and rather shallow. A single theme might be explored, but not much more than that. Certainly nothing of real substance can be experienced, considered, and settled. It was a nice night out.

Now, imagine another night out. You really are social, aren't you? This night you go back to the theater, but this time there is a five-act play. Indeed, it's *Hamlet*. Being five acts, all the characters have room to spread out. They are living, breathing figures with motivations, pasts, and desires. Multiple themes are explored. Some of the most fundamental human concerns are introduced with wisdom and depth: obligation, doubt, death, family, the nation. The action in this five-act play is complex; there is even a play within a play that advances the story and gives us clarity around different character motivations. This five-act play takes a lot longer, but it really is satisfying. It seems to cover all of human existence.

Friends in Christ, our culture, the world, wants us to think that we live in a one-act play. Depending on who you talk to, that one act is material reality where there is nothing whatsoever except that which can be measured. There is no point to this one-act play; in fact, "It is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing." Others will tell you that this one-act play we are in is all about you – all about your satisfaction and the attainment of something called *Potential*. In this play, you will strive and strive, until one fateful day, you will arrive. Another strong candidate for the one-act play of the world is a story about the accumulation of things. Gather all you can – you just have a few scenes in which to do it, and at the end of the play, the one with the most toys wins.

Those are rather boring plays. They are flat. They don't allow for any real growth. Surely, there must be more. Enter the five-act play. Theologian and priest Sam Wells, in his book, *Improvisation: The Drama of Christian Ethics*, says that we are in a five-act play. Conveniently, the five acts all start with "C": Creation, Covenant, Christ, Church, and Consummation.

Creation is, of course, the beginning of all things. Here, we get a hint of Christ the King as described in the Nicene Creed: "through him all things were made." Act two, Covenant, is where we learn that God has befriended a particular group of people, the Hebrew people, through whom God is made known. God makes an agreement to never abandon them. Act three is Christ, the coming of God to be with us in the most intimate way imaginable. In fact, it is beyond imagining that God would become a person. In traditional five-act structures, this would be a climax: the entire Christ event – incarnation, teaching, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. Act four is the Church, God with us in the Holy Spirit, even now. Finally, act five: Consummation, when we look for the return of Christ to establish the everlasting kingdom.

This is the grand five-act play of God: Creation, Covenant, Christ, Church, and Consummation. And this isn't just regular theater, where we merely sit and watch. No, God has made this some sort of *avant-garde* participatory theater. Indeed, God has set the stage for us in Creation and has been calling for us to get up at each act in Covenant, Christ, and Church. We are onstage!

Which play would you rather be in? The one that barely scratches the surface or the one that's utterly epic, where the depths can never be fully plumbed? Maybe you aren't much of an actor. So be it! This is improvisational theater, and the Holy Spirit will give you what you need to be in this play.

Christ the King. Friends, Christ is our king, but Christ is also our five-act play. Christ is not only that, but he is also the lighting, the set, the whole theater! Christ is our source and our summit. Christ is our destiny.

This is what Christ the King is meant to remind us – that we are in a grand story and – hopefully, this won't be a spoiler – we are in a comedy. We are in a comedy and comedies have happy endings. When you read God's story, which is also our story, evil after evil is woven into a larger and larger tale and God makes good from that evil. From the disobedience of Adam and Eve to the betrayal of Joseph's brothers, to David's lust, to Peter's denial, to the Cross, God continuously redeems evil in the larger tapestry of good because we are in a comedy. At the beginning of the service, we addressed our prayer to God, saying, "Almighty and everlasting God, whose will it is to restore all things in your well-beloved Son, the King of kings and Lord of lords..." This is a great comedy when, someday, God will be all in all.

The bard says, "All the world's a stage." Let's get on it and take our part in this amazing five-act comedy. Amen.

**Josh Bowron** is the rector of St. Martin's Episcopal Church in Charlotte, N.C., where he lives with his wife, four chickens, three children, two cats, and one amazing dog.