

January 5, 2025 - Let's Talk about Kings

Let's Talk about Kings
(Matthew 2:1-12)

There was a certain *je ne sais quoi* with Hawley, John and Arlyn making their way to the manger bedazzled in red capes, faux fur crowns and fancy wrapped packages. They were a great addition to our pageant. I am grateful to them but now that they have had that moment in the sun. I will put on my scholarly preacher hat and debunk the tradition and joy of those three kings, not because I am a grinch and scrooge (though you might argue I am) but because there is something even more wonderful and life giving for us. Let me lecture to you about what that is.

Beloved, there are only 2 kings talked about in the part of our sacred story we heard this morning. One is King Herod and the other the king of the Jews born in a manger. Folklore, artists, musicians have done incredible things creating a story line and powerful drama around the star followers who show up at the manger as told in Matthew. Those images are rich and etched on our hearts but they are created from artistic imaginations and not what has been passed to us in our sacred story.

There are stark differences in the 2 kings. King Herod, placed in charge of the Jewish people by the Roman Empire, is all about maintaining his power at any expense. Maintaining power requires money so he sends all the people off to be counted, accounted for, labeled and named so that they could collect taxes from them and assure the economic means to forcefully and violently spread his power. King Herod had some insecurity, its always uncertain living and reigning at the whim of empire. He heard rumors of a new king born and he was scared. He reached out to get more information about this new king. He had to find this king. He had to eliminate the threat to his way of being.

Enter the magi, astrologers, wise ones from the east, college professors, the "non-kings". They had sensed something and set out following the light of a star. King Herod asked them to help him find this new king but they didn't join in the Herod way. They found the baby, they knelt, gave gifts and paid homage and went on home avoiding Herod and not giving him any information. This sent King Herod into a tear and violence. Mary and Joseph fled to Egypt to protect the life of Jesus. King Herod issued a decree to kill all children under 2 around Bethlehem. King Herod did a lot of damage. King Herod hurt a lot of people. That King Herod and all the Herod types who have come and continue to come through the ages did not stop and can not stop the love and way of the other king.

The other king in our story is so very, very different. Even before he grows and enters into public ministry we get a sense about him by those we encounter in the Christmas stories in our sacred text. At the core is the holy mystery we call God taking on human skin and entering into a broken, violent world to love, welcome, heal and bring peace as a vulnerable, dependent infant. This king is nurtured in the womb of a peasant girl displaced from her home and with no place to stay when the time comes to deliver. This king's father turned from the practice of his day calling for the stoning of an unwed pregnant woman and instead risked his reputation and life for her and the child she carried in her womb. This king radiates a love and welcome that draws shepherds and scholars to his radical and inclusive welcome. This king begins his life undocumented and needs to flee from his own country so as not to be killed.

This king, our Jesus, whose first breath was taken in the squalor and stench of a barn; this king for whom there was no room in the comfort of an inn, shows us the sacredness present in those whom the King Herods and their followers despise, marginalize, ignore. This king, our Jesus, continues to draw people to him and his way. This king, our Jesus, defied the oppression and threats of King Herod and went on about loving and welcoming and sharing. The costumes from the pageant have been packed away and soon our nativity sets will get placed in boxes until next Advent. Oh that we could pack away the threats of the King Herods as well. But we can't, his ways endure. We also can not pack away the love and light of Jesus. He has been born and he continues to shine and his ways can not be stopped. This king, our Jesus, breathes love and hope into us in each and every stinky, disruptive, amazing circumstance of our lives and invites us to trust and follow. Amen.

Joan MacPherson
Main Street Congregational UCC
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