

Through the Strength of the Weak
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It's amazing. Interesting. Absurd. Maddening. Sometimes laughable.

Shameful. Strange...

...Where the world places value.

...And where the world strips it away.

What things do we call precious?

...What, in this world, do we hold high?

And what do we hold down low?

Let's let those questions into our minds, as we share this sacred space together, this morning.

...On what do we place the thought of worth?

And to what do we give very little thought at all?

And when I say "we", yeah, I mean you and I...

...but I'm more specifically talking about all of us *together*.... as a *group*.

---That sometimes overwhelming mass of lives

that seems to take on an almost singular life of its own.

...Feeling somehow separate from each of us as we look out.

...I'm talking about when individual persons together become "people."

That bigger "we" tends to place value on some pretty silly things, huh?

Where do we find worth?

On little paper rectangles with green drawings.

And on little shiny rocks.

---Rocks we hold preciously with gloves and observe under microscopes
to cut so the light glimmers just right.

---Minerals we spend days, years, hours, lifetimes,
digging into the dirt to drag out into the air and brush off with our hands,
so we can wash it, mold it, and house it in the most secure buildings
we can possibly build to keep it safe from grabbing hands.

And what about the flesh?

...What about the eyes, mouths, stomachs, hearts, and hopes
of other living people? People just like us?

What value do we place on those?

Very *little*, right?

While bodies toil constantly to dig into the dirt for those little shiny rocks,
And while they spend hours, days, years, and lifetimes
trying to gather as many of those little paper rectangles with green drawings

as we can possibly claim as our own,

How many men and women and children, do we pass by on the streets,

holding out their hand for just a little help,

To eat, to breathe, to survive? To just find the slightest hope of peace and comfort,

Through the rough days of a rough life?

We're kinda funny that way, huh?

People are strange that way.

... We pass those precious lives and hearts by without a second glance,

as if they exist as nothing at all.

Not taking a moment to try to wipe the dirt from their faces.

Not a thought to polish.

Not worrying too long about the fact that

there are no walls protecting them from the cold, or grabbing hands.

And we take things that hold no value whatsoever---

---aside from what our own minds create for them---

And lift them up high, above all else.

Why do we do this? It doesn't just *seem* ridiculous,

It actually *is* absurd.

But we keep doing it over and over and over and over and over again,

Through each day, each hour, each year, each lifetime.

And this isn't just a modern problem. It isn't just ours.

It's sadly been a problem since we all started here, right?

We do it, because by these imaginary and *random* rules

of what's valuable and what's not---

---these rules we *made up* for ourselves, having no actual basis in outside reality---

---we create a *system* in which we can either gain or lose *power* in the world, right?

---In varying degrees, the power to have what we need and what we want,

when we need it, and when we want it.

Silly.

Now, I know all of this is pretty heavy.

I know we come to church to be uplifted,

but we also come here to think about ways to lift the weight of the world from others...

...so that they might breathe freer and easier in their own lives.

And that weight is a *heavy* weight.

This is what Jesus spent his time preaching and teaching.

It's what he spent each of his hours, each of his days, each of his years---

---his lifetime---talking about with others.

So that's what we---God's church, Christ's church---

--will share and think about together, today.

Where do we find worth? And what is real power?

Today is “Christ the *King*” Sunday.

It’s our last sort of “normal” Sunday before Advent,

And this morning, we’re asked to think about the nature of Jesus’ *life*, together.

--That life following that birthday we’ll spend the next month celebrating.

...And our scripture readings are these:

From Luke, Chapter 1:

Speaking on the birth of Christ:

(Luke 1) 68 "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has looked favorably on his people and redeemed them. 69 He has raised up a mighty savior for us in the house of his servant David, 70 as he spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, 71 that we would be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us. 72 Thus he has shown the mercy promised to our ancestors, and has remembered his holy covenant, 73 the oath that he swore to our ancestor Abraham, to grant us 74 that we, being rescued from the hands of our enemies, might serve him without fear, 75 in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.

...78 By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, 79 to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."

Okay, so that’s from our first chapter.

The next reading comes from moments long after those.

Thirty three years later, in chapter 23.

(Luke 23) 33 When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. 34 Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." And they cast lots to divide his clothing. 35 And the people stood by, watching; but the leaders scoffed at him, saying, "He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!" 36 The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine, 37 and saying, "If

you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!" 38 There was also an inscription over him, "This is the King of the Jews." 39 One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, "Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!" 40 But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? 41 And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong." 42 Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." 43 He replied, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

---God, why would they do this?

These readings, they're so contradictory, right? So opposite of each other!

It starts out with so much hope. So much praise.

So much respect, dignity, adoration!

And then, boom! They take us here. To this place so low.

This place of so little respect.

This place of shame, and neglect.

Jesus---one moment lifted so high. Above all other things.

And in this next moment, held down so low.

About as low as a person can possibly be shoved down.

Condemned to die a long, horrible death. Treated like a criminal...

...I think it's brilliant.

Those lectionary folks... boy they were on fire for this week.

They knew what they were doing. And they were doing this:

On this "Christ the King" Sunday, these scripture readings beg us to think about this question of the *value* we place on different things in this life.

And about this question of *power*. Where it's real and

Where it's false---something just made up, and out of place.

And they show us this very simple, but beautiful truth:

Jesus, the proclaimed King and messiah... the savior praised in the first chapter of Luke...

... in his time on earth was moved from this place of power,

To utter powerlessness, in the eyes of the masses.

---In the eyes of the bigger “we,” surrounding him ----the “us.”

They remind us, that in all of those pages between chapter one and chapter 23,

Jesus spent his life turning the upside down values of the world on their head.

In his days, in his teachings, in each of his actions,

He lived to show how silly all of our hope to gain coins and *things* really is,

Jesus embraces the powerless, lifting them high,

and laying the corrupt ways of the powerful down low.

He brought to each of our eyes the sight of the preciousness

of the life we see in the eyes of another,

And uncovered the absurdity of these little rocks and metals

we lay up for ourselves while all of that precious life wastes away around us.

In Jesus, the weak found strength,

and the powerful lost their say over the whens and whats.

And his own life was a reflection of this, too.

Born to powerless people. Announced by a powerless prophet,

born to a woman disgraced by the bigger “we.”

All of these “weak” people, blessed with a very real power
amongst others as their days went on...

... a power that came not from shiny rocks and imaginary rules,
But from the overwhelming strength of the holy living God.

Through his days, Jesus lived and breathed to take away
the power of those little rocks and return it to where it belonged.
With God, and God alone.

Jesus spent each day reminding us of the value of the life inside of us,
over anything we can pull from the dirt of the ground, outside.

And in working so astoundingly through the people known as “weak,”

This homeless carpenter, Jesus, showed us the breathtaking power of the Spirit of God,
Which is the source of all things.

The One Thing which over all else, gives us what we need, when we need it.

And provides our souls with more than we can ever want or ask for,
when we hold the love of that life close and dear inside of us.

No matter how much, or how little we hold in our hands.

As this proclaimed “King of the Jews,” Jesus showed us that God’s reign

is not about the privilege of worldly power, but justice, mercy, righteousness, and love.

And not how much we take of those things, but how much we *give* those things to each other.

Jesus life brought our eyes and hearts back to the truth of what's really precious in this world.

And that is the love and life we find in each other.

And oh, they didn't like that.

That big "we" got pretty upset, when he did this, didn't they?

So they tried to flip things around again, back to where they were.

Figuring the only real way they could do this,

was to kill him and humiliate him in front of everybody else.

So they tagged him up to that Roman cross, next to people they considered the lowest.

Mocked the power he held over the hearts of others.

Trying to turn it back to where it was, before.

Telling him to name what he wanted when he wanted it.

Telling him to make what he wanted, happen.

If he was so powerful---if he was this "King."

And Jesus didn't do any of these things, right?

Instead he lived into his words about God, and kept the power where it belonged.

Instead of trying to satisfy their made-up rules about what real power is,

He turned to the powerless, valueless person beside him,

And welcomed him, in the love of God, into the paradise of the holy.

[PP]

Where do we find value in this world?

Where do we feel real power?

It's an important question to ask ourselves, because what we value in this life on the outside,

So intimately reflects the values we hold strong to, in our souls.

So as we move into Advent, and just from day to day in this world,

full of hands piled high with little pieces of paper,

And people cowering low, their hands empty, without it...

... remember what really fills us up.

Remember that the only real power in this life comes from the holy life and soul of God,

Over all of these silly little made-up rules we create for ourselves.

Let your soul thrive in the understanding that the real value is in the flesh.

--In the love we share between each other,

And not in all of those polished little rocks we spend so much time digging out of the dirt.

Remember Christ the King, our homeless savior,

Who lived and breathed to show us this truth,

And bring us closer to the heart of God, in knowing it.

That weak person, in whose birth

78 By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high [broke] upon us, [giving light to those who sat in darkness and in the shadow of death, and [guided] our feet into the way of peace."

Amen.