

# THE HOPE JOURNAL

LEARNING TO LOVE, TOGETHER



November 21, 2021

## KINGS

*and the price of granting supremacy*

by Drew Downs

We are all familiar with the saying "Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely."

We also know that it doesn't come from the Bible but from a historian, John Dalberg-Acton. OK, we know the first part, I had to look up who actually wrote it.

This is also the stuff God warns us about in Judges: that kings are not a part of the

dream God has for creation. But we wanted them anyway. Trading not only liberty, but community for certainty and security.

Humanity continues to make this trade. Even as we know better.

Holding power like that, to reign supreme, even as a god, is not good for us or anyone. It is also the source of temptation, which should set off all the alarm bells.

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## WHAT'S GOING ON

*"You know we've got to find a way  
To bring some loving here today".*

-Marvin Gaye

If you have never attended a diocesan convention, I think you are missing out. Of course, you must also consider the source. I'm not just a church nerd. I grew up going to convention with my family. First in the Diocese of Michigan and then with the forming of the Diocese of Eastern Michigan. So the experience of being with the wider church as it gathers to do its work is something I've always known.



It also means that I have seen the church continue traditions and end them; to try new things and stick with old ways. Some experiments do fail and some traditions totally overstay their welcome. But always, I've seen the diocese always strive to be its best self. Or at least the best one it knows to be.

This year, we gathered on a single day. Some in person and some virtually. And the staff worked very hard to make everyone feel included. And in it all, I felt the mixing desires that are so naturally part of our existence: of wanting a "return to normal" and innovation; of doing new things and maintaining important traditions. Tensions that every single one of us knows intimately. Even if ideologies color our preferred choices in the end, we kid ourselves if we don't consider that same tension is present within us and our own church.

And what I experienced at convention was not only that familiar desire to connect with others, but the common humanity that transcends structures and expectations, budgets and canons. That each of us is gifted for this moment.

Drew+

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## FOR SUNDAY

*The Last Sunday after Pentecost*

November 21, 2021

### **Collect**

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: Mercifully grant that the peoples of the earth, divided and enslaved by sin, may be freed and brought together under his most gracious rule; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

**Amen.**

### **Reading**

From John 18:33-37

"Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not from this world."

### **Reflection**

I make no bones about my discomfort with power; particularly with "the divine right of kings".

First, my concern stems from scripture. God, for one, told the people *for centuries* not to have a king. Even offering a proxy without the supremacy in the form of judges who could give them the good parts and none of the bad.

Second, my concern stems from reason. History has shown the supreme power of kings and other authoritarian leaders has been terrifying for humanity: both for the governed and those on the other side of the sword.

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But reason offers another critique. That attributing the same authority to God and believing "this time will be different" mirrors the kind of thinking that leads to human disasters. In other words, making Jesus a *king* (something he specifically *avoided* in scripture) has us following with him the very same steps that lead to disaster for us in our own world.

Which leads me to the third piece. That my concern seems to run *against* our tradition. And feels doubly ironic as an Anglican—knowing our church began as an act of fiat by a king.

So when I read Jesus's conversation with Pilate in this week's gospel, I have all these swirling thoughts from scripture, tradition, and reason flying around me. But we are also privy to a fascinating bit of dialogue between two people who don't just have a lot of earthly power, they also command a great deal of authority.

And yet, Pilate is no emperor, and Jesus is no king.

There is a way in which we might see two people caught up in a moment, compelled by the forces around them toward actions that they themselves don't wish to take.

It reminds me of the sage wisdom my sponsoring Bishop gave me: the higher the office, the less power *you* have to be *you*.

And yet Jesus is the only one actually being true to himself. He isn't a king, even as people try to pin the title upon him. He isn't encumbered by their expectations because he is committed to the mission. Not the one that goes through earthly power patterns. But the one he lives out with his life. To be himself.

And you are called to be you.

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