

Zechariah 9:9

Unless we're in the habit of following British royalty, the closest we come to kings and queens is when we sit down to play a game of chess or checkers. Chess has both a king and a queen, along with knights, castles, and swordsmen. Checkers is pretty boring compared to that, although a glorious moment for a checkers player is when he can exclaim to his opponent, "king me!" Once a piece has been kinged, that piece has a clear advantage. It can move in any direction on the board. It is very difficult for an opponent to capture a piece that has been kinged.

Today is Palm Sunday. But in looking closely at our Scripture readings, we could call today "King Sunday." The word king is all over the place. Five times in our Introit. Once in our Old Testament lesson. Twice in our Gospel processional. And six times in the appointed Gospel reading from St. Mark. That's fourteen times if you do the math. There's more kinging going on today than in a marathon checkers game. It seems to me that God wants to make something crystal clear to us: Jesus is a king, and His coronation takes place during Holy Week as He is nailed to a cross.

That gives a whole new meaning to the phrase, "king me!" Where is His advantage? Rather than being able to move anywhere that He wants, Jesus is held in place by nails piercing His hands and feet. Rather than being difficult to capture by His opponents, Jesus is easily captured in the Garden of Gethsemane, and He puts up no resistance at all throughout His trial before Pilate. There is no king on earth, whether in real life or in a game of checkers, who compares to the kind of king we see in Jesus.

Now this is a little strange, because in our Introit from Psalm 24, Jesus is called the king of glory. He is "*the Lord, strong and mighty; mighty in battle.*" What kind of king comes to a battle with no weapon in his hand? What kind of king rides into the capitol city not on a warhorse, but on a lowly donkey? And what kind of king refuses to fight when everything hangs in the balance? It would be a poor checkers player indeed who, after exclaiming, "king me!" puts his kinged piece in jeopardy and allows it to be captured by his opponent.

"*Behold your king!*" shouts the prophet Zechariah in our first reading for today. But when we take a look to behold Him, we see a man dressed in a purple cloak with thorns twisted into a crown for His head. We see this man exchanging a lowly donkey for an even lowlier cross. We see subjects down beneath His feet, but these subjects are mocking Him and spitting on Him. And we see a king who orders, not the death of His enemies, but rather pleads for His enemies to be forgiven for what they do.

"*Behold your king!*" Is it any wonder that those who gather around this king on Sunday mornings, as you do today, are minuscule in comparison to those who do not? Who wants to follow a king like this? We'll take an Easter king. We'll come out and sing His praises on Easter Sunday. But forget this coronation ceremony during Holy Week. A king should not suffer and die in disgrace, but should live in triumph over his enemies. Only then are we proud to call ourselves His followers.

But unless we follow our king to His cross, we have no right to call Him our king on Easter morning. Unless we suffer and die with our king in our baptism, we cannot rise with our king in His resurrection.

"*Behold your king is coming to you...humble and mounted on a donkey.*" When Mary, on Easter morning, saw that the gardener by the tomb was really the risen Lord, Jesus told her, "*Stop clinging to*

Me.” Even though He is risen--triumphant over His enemies--our king refuses to be grasped and apprehended apart from the lowliness of His donkey. We have an Easter king, but Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, and Good Friday proclaim to us the manner in which we can cling to Him and receive Him as our king.

Your king comes to you on the humble donkey of Baptism. He comes to you in the Supper He gave to His church on Maundy Thursday. Your king comes to you through the Word of the Cross--foolishness to those who are perishing--but to us who are being saved, the power of God.

“Behold your king comes to you.” We like to turn these words around. We think that it’s we who come to our king. But that’s quite impossible. Lazarus died just before Palm Sunday. We can no more come to Jesus than he could. Our sins entomb us. They wrap us up and mummify us. They separate us from God and from each other. But your king comes to you. He came to the tomb of Lazarus and raised him up. And this same Jesus came to you in your baptism to raise you out of the death of sin into life.

In a certain sense, in your baptism you exclaimed with joy, “king me!” because at that moment you became sons and daughters of your king. And now you are free to move anywhere in life unburdened from the guilt of your sin. The nails were driven into your king. He was held there on the cross to suffer punishment. You are declared free. Your sin is forgiven. Your burden of guilt is removed. Because you have been kinged by Jesus in your baptism, your opponent is unable to capture you. Your king was captured in Gethsemane for you so that the devil cannot hold you in his hellish prison.

You have been kinged, my friend. Jesus kinged you in your baptism. This is why you cling to His word of the cross for you. You are claimed by your king. This is why you join Him in His meal for you. Through these things you cling to your king, because here in these holy things is the lowly donkey upon which your king rides to you.

He chooses no warhorse upon which to ride. He comes to you gently because He is full of love for you. He comes with no weapon in His hand, but only with the word of peace in His mouth for you. He comes not to punish, but to forgive. You may be the worst sinner on earth--and really, each one of us is--but Jesus still comes to you...today, right now...with nothing but forgiveness for you. He took your sin. He took your punishment. That’s why He died on a cross for you. Your king forgives each and every one of you.

So, friend, when the devil tempts you, remind him that you have been kinged by Jesus in your baptism. When sin tries to wrap you up and overwhelm you, remember that you are kinged. This is no checkers game. This is real life. And at the end of your life when Jesus brings you to the gate of heaven, you will exclaim to your heavenly Father, “king me!” for in Christ, you will have been victorious! Amen.