

## ***Changing Our Thinking, Changing Our Acting***

A message shared with the congregation of St. Andrew's United Church

November 26, 2023

by Rev. Dave Le Grand

You might have been intrigued by the Theme for today. Of course it is St. Andrew's Sunday, so Happy St. Andrew's Sunday! But the theme we landed on today is: Christ (not the) King Sunday. Let me talk a bit about that.

I wonder, what if we surveyed our whole congregation, asking: *Who is Jesus most like for you?* How would you answer? Is he a "friend" to you? Is he a "teacher" for you, or a "king" or "lord", or maybe a "healer"? Maybe for someone he is a "revolutionary" or a "liberator" for those who are on the margins.

Unlike some other mainstream religions where God is very much transcendent – set apart from human existence – Christianity, emerging from the world of Judaism, adopted a radical Faith Story, of God being born as a child within humanity. Thus began a complex theological tug of war – Jesus seen by our tradition as divine (transcending human machinations), but also, very much, human, and vulnerable; God born of a young girl in Palestine.

So, who is Jesus to you? Tradition calls this Christ the King Sunday, or Reign of Christ Sunday. Unfortunately, human history is riddled with narcissistic, tyrannical royals – though perhaps we would agree that the longest reigning Queen embodied kindness and compassion. But did the Queen really understand us? Really? I'm not convinced that a sovereign can authentically empathize with us.

Our present United Church Moderator, the Rev. Dr. Carmen Lansdowne, of the Heiltsuk (Hail tsuk) First Nation, expressed a sense of disconnect God or Jesus as King or Lord. To relate to Jesus as King comes with colonial baggage, particularly for Indigenous peoples. When Royalty first collided with the culture already here in Canada, in Turtle Island, for Indigenous Peoples, European royalty brought with it, conquest, displaced, and the decimation of a rich culture.

A poll taken in 2022 showed that roughly half of Canadians agree "that now that Queen Elizabeth II's reign has ended, Canada should end its formal ties to the British monarchy."<sup>1</sup> For people under 55 years old, that percentage increases. Images of a King or Queen are not as inspiring to the new generation as they were to previous ones.

Perhaps I need to beware, as all of us who offer public prayers using images for God and Jesus as Lord or King – perhaps we need to be wary of allowing such associations.

How about you, bravely starting a conversation with someone who is already a bit more comfortable talking about their faith – can you ask them: *What image for God, or for Jesus, is powerful for you?*

Hey, and if you know a person who has been turned off by church, be daring and try that question on them: *How would you imagine Jesus to be? A friend? A teacher? A lord or king? A troublemaker turning conventional thinking upside down?*

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<sup>1</sup> Roughly half (54%) agree (20% strongly/33% somewhat). For more detail, see IPSOS at <https://www.ipsos.com/en-ca/news-polls/canadians-conflicted-on-future-role-of-monarchy>

This weekend, our Regional Council voted overwhelmingly to lay the groundwork for the creation of an Indigenous Church. There are many such votes among Regional Councils and Congregational Boards and Councils to come. This change is a big one, and one that frees up Indigenous United Church Communities of Faith to make decisions in their way, honouring their culture and style. I'm thinking that we the non-Indigenous Church might learn, or unlearn, some ways of understanding God and Jesus as we open ourselves up to some theological spring cleaning. Expanding our understandings of Jesus on this Christ (not necessarily the) King Sunday.

Perhaps you and I can be open to new ways of thinking. And, is it true that *what we think and believe* reveals itself in our actions, who knows what the Spirit might compel us to do for love and healing! Amen.