

"Oh, I Just Can't Wait to Be King: David, Jesus, and True Power"
Sermon for July 25, 2021
Trinity Episcopal Church, Asbury Park
The Rev. Chase Danford, Priest-in-Charge

From Disney's The Lion King:

Oh, I just can't wait to be king!

Everybody look left

Everybody look right

Everywhere you look I'm standing in the spotlight!

I'm gonna be the main event, like no king was before

I'm brushing up on looking down, I'm working on my roar!

No one saying do this

No one saying be there

No one saying stop that

No one saying see here

Free to run around all day

Free to do it all my way!

Oh, I just can't wait to be king!

This is Young Simba's song to the royal majordomo Zazu, who has been charged with watching over the heir to the throne. Simba doesn't want anyone telling him what to do, and his vision of being a king is having the freedom to do it all his way. It is, of course, a child's vision of what it means to be a ruler, and Simba's father, Mustafa, tried to impress upon his son that being a king means much more. It means taking care of others and being a steward of the circle of life.

This is a lesson that King David forgot for a time. We read in today's lesson from 2 Samuel about his greatest failure of character, his gravest failure as king. David was walking about the roof of the king's house, surveilling his realm. Like Simba looking out on the Pride Lands, perhaps he too thought, "all this is mine!" As he looked down, he saw a beautiful woman bathing. He was told that it was Bathsheba, wife of Uriah the Hittite. Ok, she's married. But that wasn't a problem for David. He is the king, after all, and that all in his dominion is his to enjoy. So he summoned her. One wonders how Bathsheba felt about this summons. One cannot

refuse the king, after all. Then, a big problem emerges. Bathsheba becomes pregnant, and there's no question of it being Uriah's child because he has been out fighting David's war. So, David calls him back from the frontlines, assuming that Uriah will be reunited with his wife, and he'll be none the wiser when his wife gives birth. But Uriah does not go home. He cannot do that, he says, while his colleagues are in the field. David then tries to get him drunk so that maybe Uriah will go home. But it doesn't work. So, David does the unthinkable. He betrays the trust given to him as king by plotting Uriah's death. He sends him into battle, to the hardest fighting, and instructs his commander to draw back the forces to make sure Uriah dies. This sets in motion a tragic chain of events that will bring much sorrow and destruction to David's family and kingdom. As the prophet Nathan will tell David in next week's reading when he confronts him about his abuse of power, "Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house."

Free to do it all my way!

Oh, I just can't wait to be king!

Today's gospel reading contains a marked contrast to the story of David's abuse of power. Wedged between the two great miracle stories of the feeding of the five thousand and Jesus walking on water, we have this one little sentence: "When Jesus realized that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain by himself." The people had seen a miracle. Five loaves of bread and two fish fed five thousand people. The crumbs gathered from the barley loaves filled twelve baskets. When the people saw this sign, they said of Jesus, "This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world." Jesus realized that they were going to try to make him king. And he wasn't going to let them, so he escaped and went away by himself. Jesus did not want to be king. Perhaps there are three miracles in this lesson. Not just the feeding of the five thousand and walking on water, but also the miracle of renunciation. No, I will not be king. While not unheard of, it's not all that common for people to reject the possibility of power. And when an office is refused, it is often done for the sake of gaining greater power through other, less official channels.

Perhaps this is actually what Jesus is doing in this story. He's a smart guy. After all, he's the one who had said be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. He has to know that just because five thousand people want to make him king, that's not going to make a difference against the Roman army. Even if they could overthrow the garrison, would the Empire allow a colony to free itself? More troops would be deployed, and many people would die. Even if Jesus had been interested in human power, he would have realized this wouldn't work. And yet, how many other people have been carried away in hubris and tried to take power when the opportunity came? Jesus resisted, just as he did when the devil tempted him in the wilderness. All the kingdoms of the earth could have been his. But no, Jesus would not turn from God.

Jesus knew that there was a power greater than human strength and military might, and greater even than money. Jesus knew that love is the greatest power in the the world. He did not want to be king, but he wanted to help the people. Surely, as king, he could have done so much to alleviate suffering. But he was not meant to be an earthly ruler. He would be a king of love and a

prince of peace. His power would be exercised through his life of service, his death, and his resurrection. And he gave us a meal to share, to empower us, just as he did in this miracle story. At the feeding of the five thousand, notice that Jesus turned into a proper banquet. He made the people sit down. And then he took the loaves and the fish, gave thanks for them, and then distributed them. Does this sound familiar? Perhaps like something we do each week in church? The feeding of the 5,000 foreshadows the Last Supper, when Jesus takes, blesses, breaks, and gives bread to his disciples, saying "Take, this is my body."

At the feeding of the five thousand, Jesus creates an earthly feast as a sign that points to a heavenly, eternal banquet. In the Eucharist, we are united to God and to one another through the bread of life, the body of Christ. At the Eucharist, as at the feast of the five thousand, we are invited us to a table headed by a sovereign more powerful than any ruler of the earth. Here, today, we are invited to a feast of love. Nourished by the love we find at Christ's Table, we are commissioned to go out and share that love--Christ's love, which becomes our love--with all the world. Instead of being free to do it all our way, Jesus, who renounces kingship, invites us to become a caring community, one in which our freedom is joined to the liberation of all our siblings in Christ, all of God's children. Jesus shows us that the greatest power is not ruling over, but sharing together.

Perhaps, inspired by Simba the Lion King and by Jesus our Sovereign of Love, we can sing a new song:

*Everybody look left
Everybody look right
Everywhere you look we're standing in God's light!*

Oh, I just can't wait to be loved!

Amen.