



## **“Looking for Someone”**

**2 Samuel 23:1-5**

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**Reign of Christ Sunday**

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*Now these are the last words of David: The oracle of David, son of Jesse, the oracle of the man whom God exalted, the anointed of the God of Jacob, the favorite of the Strong One of Israel: "The spirit of the Lord speaks through me, God's word is upon my tongue. The God of Israel has spoken.*

*The Rock of Israel has said to me: One who rules over people justly, ruling in the fear of God, is like the light of morning, like the sun rising on a cloudless morning, gleaming from the rain on the grassy land.'*

*"Is not my house like this with God? For God has made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and secure. Will God not cause to prosper all my help and my desire?"*

- 2 Samuel 23:1-5

It is 713 days until the presidential election. Some of you knew that. If you google "Democratic presidential hopefuls" you get a new article every few hours. According to *The Washington Examiner*, 457 Democrats are considering a run for president. 457! 55 are considered top-tier candidates. 55! The top-tier candidates include the mayor of South Bend, Indiana, and the former Secretary of State of Missouri. Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson is top-tier.

(<https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/washington-secrets/2020-list-457-democrats-eye-presidential-nomination-55-top-tier>)

The New York Times has already run an article with the title, "How Trump Won Re-election in 2020."

(<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/26/opinion/trump-re-election-2020.html>)

People have always longed for a great leader. The peasants wait nervously outside the palace to learn the identity of their new king. They hope for a strong leader, because their lives are at stake. The tribe sends its elders to select a new chief. The process is long and laborious, because they understand that their survival depends on the wisdom of the one they choose.

Every four years on the first Tuesday in November we cast ballots that are part of the convoluted system by which we elect presidents. Every time we step into the voting booth we carry naive hopes that happy days will be here again.

People hope for a hero who will fix the problems. We look for someone to make everything perfect. The world longs for a leader who will bring a bright, shining future.

You and I might want to think that we have outgrown our need for someone to follow, but we still need examples. People do not follow ideas. They follow other people. Giving yourself to a principle is not as real as giving yourself to a person. At times, sophisticated Christians give the impression that the center of the Christian faith is a principle. We like the idea of centering our lives on love or justice, but that does not fill the need we have for someone to emulate, for a leader who shows us what love and justice look like.

King David embodied the hopes of Israel. At his best David was magnificent: anointed as king while he was just a boy, slaying the giant Goliath, befriending Jonathan, and refusing to kill his enemy Saul when he had the chance. The Hebrew people adored the one after God's own heart. They sang about the day he captured Jerusalem and danced before the ark. David's kingdom was magical—trumpets, towers, tapestries, capes, sashes, long flowing robes, glimmering gold crowns, sparkling silver scepters, bowing and curtsying, pomp and circumstance, pageantry and ceremony.

This is Camelot's round table where they dream of a kingdom where might is used for right and there is justice for all. Shining knights like angels in armor battle to snuff out evil. This is where the rain never falls till after sundown, where by eight the morning fog disappears. It was happily ever after for one brief shining moment.

At his best David was the most splendid king who ever sat on any throne, the embodiment of high hopes and big dreams, but the dream did not last. At the end David was king of a

divided, disorganized, disintegrating kingdom. His reign was marked by tragedy—David’s assault of Bathsheba, the murder of Uriah, the rape of David’s daughter by his son, the rebellion and execution of Absalom—the apple of David’s eye.

There was continuous fighting between the tribes of Israel. They fought over the smallest details—once arguing over which tribe would be the first to welcome David back to Jerusalem. They went through a famine, which they believed to be God’s punishment for King Saul’s mistakes, so they murdered seven members of Saul’s family. There were wars with the Philistines.

Finally David decides he is too old to go into battle anymore. His life ends in disappointment. His hopes vanish into thin air. The round table cracks. The timbers split.

In the play Camelot, as the final war is about to begin, Sir Lancelot asks the king, “Is it your wish, Arthur, that this dread battle go on?”

Arthur answers: “No, it’s not my wish. But I can think no longer what to do but ride the tide of events. All we’ve been through, for nothing but an idea! Something you cannot taste or touch, smell or feel; without substance, life, reality or memory.”

Shining moments are brief. David comes to the end of his days at the end of his dreams. And yet David’s last words, are not, as we might expect, filled with regrets. The one dream that does not die is of one yet to come.

David almost sings his farewell address: “The spirit of the Lord speaks through me, God’s word is upon my tongue. The God of Israel has spoken. The Rock of Israel has said to me: ‘One who rules over people justly, ruling in the fear of God, is like the light of morning, like the sun rising on a cloudless morning, gleaming from the rain on the grassy land. God has made an everlasting covenant.’ When God’s promised one comes he’ll be bright as the rising sun on a clear blue sky.”

When the king of whom David dreamed finally comes, David would not have recognized him. Pontius Pilate, the Roman ruler of Judea, is a friend of the Caesar’s, so he knows

what a king looks like. The soldiers bring in the latest backwoods messiah. Jesus stands with his hands tied behind his back. He has been roughed up. His upper lip is puffed out. One eye is swollen shut. His feet are the bare, worn feet of a peasant.

If there were just the two of them, Pilate would send him home, but the guards are watching, and Caesar's portrait is on the wall so he goes through the formalities: "So you're the king of the Jews." There have been a stream of them—David come back to give Judea back to the Jews.

Jesus explains, "It's not this world I'm king of," but his accent is so thick that Pilate hardly gets it, the accent together with what they have done to his upper lip. As if he has a mouthful of stones, Jesus says, "My kingdom's not from here."

The guards are not paying much attention. Neither is Pilate. He finds it hard to believe that this poor man could even be accused of being a king. Jesus' royal entourage will be two criminals hanging on either side of him. His court will be those who come to mock him. His throne will be a cross. How could any kingship this man could claim be a threat to Caesar?

Peter Fribley writes: "How can you be king who ruled with stories? Who walked to work and slept beneath the stars? How can you be king who lived among the poor, called them neighbor? How can you be king who filled your calendar with people kings have no time for? Who blessed the pure in heart and made no deal? How can you be king who refused kingdoms, claimed no crown, walked to work, thumbed a ride to town?"

According to Pilate's definition—and ours—no one who looks like Jesus could be a great leader. Jesus' story is not the hero's story we would write. Religious people usually talk about Christ in abstract terms. It may be that church people debate the meaning of the incarnation, the cross, and the resurrection, in part, as a way of avoiding Jesus.

Propositional ideas and theological arguments fade in comparison to Jesus. Our theories about Christ are not nearly as

important as the way we respond to Christ. Whoever he was or was not, whoever he thought he was, whoever he has become in the memories of humankind—exalted, sentimentalized, made and remade in the shape of each generation’s desire, for all of us there remains something compelling about Jesus. To focus on Jesus is to be challenged, shaken, and humbled.

Frederick Buechner argues that we shrink from focusing on Jesus, from looking Jesus in the face, because “the risk is too great; the risk that his face would be too much for us, a face so unlike any other that we would have no choice but to remember it always and follow or flee it to the end of our days and beyond.”

No matter how detached we think we are, something comforting in Jesus’ words, surprising in Jesus’ actions, holy in Jesus’ face still says “follow me.” What would it mean to follow Christ, to be loyal to Christ before anything else?

Christ would come before our country, political party, jobs, friends, family, and our own selfish wishes. To follow Christ would be to stand for what Jesus stands for. His values would be our values. His priorities would be our priorities. To follow Christ is to choose his life as the guide for our lives, to let Jesus’ hopes become our hopes.

What we most need from Jesus is his vision. Jesus called his greatest dream the kingdom. He talked about it as a great banquet, a hidden treasure, a pearl of great price, a kingdom where the prodigal and his brother celebrate together, a kingdom for the poor in spirit, the hungry, the merciful, the pure in heart, those who mourn; a kingdom for widows and orphans, the sick and the lonely, the has-beens and never-weres.

Imagine the world as good as you can imagine it. Christ has imagined it far better. Jesus dreamed of a time when hatred, racism and revenge will be purged from our memories, a kingdom where violence is not strength and compassion is not weakness, where the blind see as far as forever, the deaf listen to

Beethoven's ninth, the hungry dine on lobster and white truffles, where there is no more money, for there is no more need.

Imagine a kingdom where every person is loved, where male and female, black and white, gay and straight, rich and poor, old and young are treated equally, where the fellowship of the church is as wide as the love of God. Imagine beauty, joy, and kindness too good not to be true.

If we catch Jesus' vision of peace, laughter, and wonder, if we have the courage to dream Jesus' dream, then we will be freed from our small worlds and our pathetic self-centeredness.

Edgar Allan Poe writes: "Those who dream by day are cognizant of many things which escape those who dream only by night." Christ's dream will lead us to work for justice and live with love. Our drop in the great blue motion of the sunlit sea can sparkle.

When we give ourselves to Christ's vision we will see that one day the truest things that we have ever dreamed will come to pass. The one who is, and was, and is to come will come with joy that will overwhelm our despair.

In the year 433, St. Patrick learned that his enemies planned to ambush his group as they traveled to meet the king. Patrick wrote a prayer for them to recite as they made their journey.

This is what St. Patrick prayed:  
"I bind myself to the strong virtue of love  
I bind myself to the power of heaven  
the light of the sun  
the brightness of the moon  
the splendor of fire  
the flashing of lightning  
the swiftness of wind  
the depth of the sea  
and the firmness of earth.  
I bind myself today to God's strength to guide me  
God's might to uphold me  
God's wisdom to teach me

God's eye to watch over me  
God's ear to hear me  
God's word to give me speech.  
Christ with me and before me  
Christ behind me and within me  
Christ to the right of me,  
Christ to the left of me  
Christ above me,  
Christ beneath me.  
Christ in the heart of everyone who thinks of me,  
Christ in the eye of everyone who sees me,  
Christ in the ear of everyone who hears me,  
I bind myself today  
to the strong virtue of Christ.”

*Sermon © Rev. Brett Younger*

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