

The Rev. Emily Dunevant

John 18:33-37

Daniel 7:9-10,13-14

Psalm 93

Revelation 1:4b-8

November 21, 2021

Christ the King

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This week, I had a little accident. It was during my riding lesson and we were working on a jumping exercise that required both horse and rider to be on point in all aspects of what we were doing. We had to be straight to the jump. I had to sit up tall and not move my body too far forward. River had to keep a consistent stride and he had to really engage his back muscles to get us both safely to the other side.

Well, we faltered on the final jump of the lesson. It didn't come together and I somersaulted over River's head, onto my back, and took out the jump along with me. Just so you know...I am fine...just a little bruised and battered.

Now, when you fall off of a horse, what is the one cardinal rule you must follow?

You get back on. It's the same when you are learning to ride a bike. If you have taught a child how to ride, you know the tension of the moment, when everything has to come together ...balance, pedaling, straight handlebars...and when it's all in place you let go of the back of the seat and let them take off on their own. They are doing so good, staying so balanced...until they aren't. And when they fall, what do you encourage them to do?

You encourage them to get back on. But, why?

Why is it important for us to get back up after we have fallen? Sure, you get back up so you learn not to be afraid. That's one reason. You get back up because you learn resilience. That's another reason. Those are all good but I want to suggest they are simply by-products to a deeper truth.

I think we get back up because we love what we are doing. We want to get it right because it matters. Not out of duty or obligation but out of the joy of living. A child doesn't understand the psychology of overcoming their fear or building resilience. We know as adults that those things are important. But, a child gets back on their bike because they want to learn with all of their heart. It's a pure expression of love.

It's the same for many of us when we have something we love to do. We keep at it, we get back up. Because it matters to us deep within our souls.

I want you to keep this idea at the forefront of your mind this morning – the drive to get back up for the things you love.

Today on our liturgical calendar we recognize Christ the King Sunday. That simply means that today, we reflect on the nature of Jesus Christ as Lord. It's not so much a study in scripture on as it is a study in purpose. A time when we reflect on what loving Jesus as our king truly means. What makes us love Jesus so much that we want to follow this king even when it's hard, even when we get knocked down, even when it's inconvenient? What makes it worth it?

To get at such a deep love for Christ, I think it's helpful to first consider what we know about the kingship of Christ. What values did he impart to us? What type of leader was Jesus?

Well, we know that as a leader, Jesus was not your typical CEO. He didn't follow the expectations of the world around him and he certainly didn't lead by force or guilt or heavy-handedness. He didn't lead by pride or hubris. Jesus led by humility and conviction and dedication. Do we love that kind of king?

Jesus also led by standing up for others even at his own personal risk. He led by caring for the hungry and the sick and the oppressed. He was willing to do the hard work of reconciliation and advocacy. Do we love that kind of king?

Jesus led by speaking the truth even when it wasn't popular and even when it didn't bring personal glory. He kept doing the work in spite of what others said. Do we love that kind of king?

Jesus led by getting his hands dirty, by not getting caught up in material wants or political gain. He centered his actions and his words on the love of God and the love of his neighbor. Do we love that kind of king?

I hope you are saying yes to all of these things because these are Jesus' values. These are the ways Jesus showed love and leadership even when it wasn't the easiest thing to do. He stayed focused on the things that mattered and he did his part. He did it because his desire came from his soul. He loved humanity and he loved God and therefore, kept at it. He kept getting back up and doing the work because it was worth it.

And...Jesus encouraged us to follow his example in all of these ways. To fully participate along with him. To be humble, to be convicted, to show up, to do the work, to give of our time for the good of God's creation and for the good of our neighbor.

Do we love that kind of king? That kind of king who asks something of us?

Folks...here's the thing about love...to really love someone or something means we have to participate with what and with whom we love. It's a love built upon self-less giving and gratitude and kindness. It's the kind of love that shows up. It's the kind of love that is persistent. It's the kind of love that is a blessing, not a burden.

So, what does this have to do with getting back on the bike or getting back up on a horse?

It's simple. We have all fallen down at times, we have gotten distracted from our faith and from the things that truly matter. We have gotten frustrated. We have criticized one another when things haven't gone our way. We have pointed fingers and made judgements. The last year and half have tested our faith and our families. It has tested our love and dedication to the things that truly matter. It has tested the way we follow Christ as our King.

And, as a result, we have gotten comfortable not getting back up and trying again. We have gotten comfortable not putting ourselves out there to say I love you Lord and I am ready to get back up. But what if ease and comfort weren't the ultimate goals? What if the joy of living a life in Christ was?

It's no fun to fall. We all know that. It hurts and we get bruised. But if that thing we love is worth anything, it's worth getting back up and trying again.

This week, as we say, YES to following this King, as we commit to loving this king, we also commit to getting back up and living as Christ taught us. We get back up because it's worth it. Amen.