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Immanuel Lutheran Church, New York, NY  
11/23/2014, Christ the King  
Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24, Matthew 25:31-46

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Let me open this sermon by reading a couple verses from our First Lesson, from Ezekiel 34. The Church believes that Ezekiel's beautiful promise will come true when our Lord Jesus comes again with power and beauty. So, think of these old words of Ezekiel as being the words of Christ the King, for they are:

<sup>15</sup>I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I will make them lie down [in good grazing land], says the Lord GOD. <sup>16</sup>I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the crippled, and I will strengthen the weak, and the fat and the strong I will watch over; I will feed them in justice. (Ezekiel 34:15-16, RSV)

When I tell elderly folks that Jesus is coming again, they often answer, "Amen! Come, Lord Jesus!" They are fervent in their prayers and in their desires that Jesus should come again with beauty and power and set things right in this world of ours.

I like to imagine that. And in imagining that, I hope I become at least a somewhat better person. So, let us imagine the reign of Christ the King. That is today's subject: Our Lord Jesus, our beautiful Savior, is this world's rightful king, and I can hardly wait for him to come again and improve things.

## **THE N6 BUS**

For example, there is an unlucky bus ride out in Nassau County, just beyond Queens. At least it is an unlucky bus ride for me. A great thing about visiting our dear member Ann Siemer is that I can travel all the way to the Plattduetsche Home, where Ann lives, on just one token. ("Token." That betrays that I have been in the city for a good while now. It means one fare.) I simply take the F-train to the end of the line: 179<sup>th</sup> Street in Jamaica, Queens. Then I wait around a while and transfer onto the N6 bus, which goes right by the Plattduetsche Home.

But getting onto that N6 bus is where my luck often runs out. Getting onto that N6 bus is often hard, not just for me, but for everyone. My theory about what ails that bus is that there is a bad tradition of courtesy in play on that particular bus. I travel on lots of city buses, but this N6 bus is unusual for its impoliteness. For one thing, people do not save the front seats for the elderly or the infirm. Nor do they yield those seats to the elderly. It's "every man for himself" on that bus.

But even more frustrating is the fact that people bunch up at the front of the bus. It's as if they never heard Raffi sing "The Wheels on the Bus Go Round and Round" when they were children, especially that verse about "move on back":

The driver on the bus goes 'move on back'  
Move on back  
Move on back  
The driver on the bus goes 'move on back'  
All 'round the town<sup>1</sup>

Well, I think the poor drivers of the N6 bus have grown weary and given up saying "move on back." I've heard them say that, plead that, but the people remain in place like bumps on a log. They seem not to move an inch. I've actually seen the bus driver open the rear door – the exit door – so that the people waiting on the sidewalk would have some way of getting onto the bus. Forget the fare! It just is not right that there should be space at the back of the bus, but people can't get on because everyone is bunched up at the front. Bad tradition of courtesy, I say.

Now, imagine that Jesus comes again. Imagine what is going to happen when Christ the King steps onto that bus. If you or I were to take people by the arm and lead them on to the back of the bus, the people might become mean to us. They might yell at us, or curse us, or even beat us up. But they won't do that when Christ the King steps onto the bus. If some young person is sitting in the front seats while an elderly person is near to collapsing in the aisle, Christ the King will teach that young person that the polite thing to do is to yield your seat to the elderly, to the infirm, and to pregnant ladies. And here's the great thing: the young person will be glad to be taught this. He will not dare to curse or strike Jesus. Better yet, he will not even think about such violence. Rather, he will think to himself, "Yes, that *is* the better way. That is the more perfect way, the more holy way. It is the way I want to live." For you see, when Jesus comes again, he will come with "beauty and power." He will come with the beauty and the power to convert people's hearts, so that they gladly live better lives. So, the young person resting on the front seat will spring up and gladly offer it to the elderly and take his own place standing and moving on to the back of the bus so that there is room for others to get on the bus.

Even the most brutal and scary-looking guy will change his tune when Jesus gets on the bus – not so much because he is intimidated by Christ the King, but because at last Someone has taught him, with beauty and power, how to be a better person in this world. And he will leap to it.

Then, this town is going to be a better place.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.moron.nl/lyrics/raffi/wheels-on-the-bus-lyrics.html>

## **EDINA**

Consider another case. This is a story about an orphan girl named Edina. It is one of many stories about children supported by the Gayle Lyn Kliever Student Fund<sup>2</sup>, which provides scholarships for children in Tanzania. Edina's mother died when Edina was five. Her father had already died. Five-year-old Edina, then, took charge of her two younger brothers, two and three years old. Think of that: a five-year little girl doing the best she can to care for a two-year-old and a three-year old. Glad to say, there was a grandmother. Edina and her little brothers went to live with a 75-year-old grandmother, who was taking care of fourteen children in all. Where would many people be without grandmothers? Edina's job was to care for her younger brothers. She had no ability to go to school. There was barely enough food for everybody so Edina was very small for her age.

When she was about seven years old, one of the directors for the Gayle Kliever Student Fund (Judith Bukambu) discovered Edina and must have seen her potential for education. Through the Fund, Edina was able to attend a boarding school, where she is now flourishing.

There are many more stories like hers. So many orphans in Tanzania.

Now, when Jesus comes again, things are going to get a whole lot better for orphans like Edina and her little brothers. For one thing, Christ the King is going to boldly walk up to some well-to-do person, maybe here in New York City, and say to him, to her, "It's time to do some more good with your money." You or I might flinch to tell someone that they should be more compassionate and charitable in the use of their money. Rich people are sometimes smarter and better talkers than the rest of us. They might rebuke us for asking them to be more charitable. They might tie us in knots with their knowledge of economics and their convictions about how the world works. We might have tried in the past to have urged someone to show pity on a sad world by being more generous. And we might have been burned for doing so, such that we don't intend to try that again. But the great thing about the return of Jesus is that the well-to-do person will not rebuke Christ the King. The thought will never even enter his heart, because the beauty and power of Jesus then will convert the human heart and free it for the good deeds for which God created the well-to-do person in the first place.

And get this: I do believe that Christ the King has already whispered in the hearts of some people, and we are already supporting the Gayle Kliever Fund, even if we are not rich. May such whispering in our hearts continue, and may obedience to such divine whispering flourish on earth more and more.

## **KINGS**

Let me imagine a third go-round on the return of Jesus with power and beauty. This time think of this world's rulers. Imagine a mayor or a governor or a president. You and I might be tongue-tied and intimidated to be led into some

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.glkstudentfund.com/>

governor's office. But not Christ the King. Whether he is bid to enter or not, whether the door is open or closed and locked, it matters not. He simply appears there in the midst of the room. And for all we know, he might look the governor straight in the eye and say to him, "You are not really a governor. Rather, you are a used-car salesman." And the governor, bless him, will take no offense, but answer Jesus, saying, "You are absolutely right. I *love* cars. And I love used cars and feel that they can be a great value for the ordinary working person. I would love to be a used-car salesman. And to be honest, I am not very good at being the governor. My heart is not really in it, plus I am too easily tempted and distracted. So I am glad to leave this office behind and head off to the used car lot. There I feel I can really do some good."

Judging by this evening's Ezekiel reading, the governors and the kings of Israel were especially on the Lord's mind. Those kings were supposed to be shepherds for the people. Their job was to lead the people into green pastures, and their responsibility was to lay down their own lives if need be so that the sheep could live. Above all, the kings were to be pious and humble people, filled with the yearning to serve the people. In fact, according to Deuteronomy 17, the first task of the newly crowned king was to do some writing and some learning. His first job was to right out a copy of the Torah and to keep it with him and to read it all the days of his life so that he would revere the Lord his God and "not consider himself better than his brothers"<sup>3</sup>

<sup>18</sup>"And when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself in a book a copy of this law, from that which is in the charge of the Levitical priests; <sup>19</sup>and it shall be with him, and he shall read in it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the LORD his God, by keeping all the words of this law and these statutes, and doing them; <sup>20</sup>that his heart may not be lifted up above his brethren, and that he may not turn aside from the commandment, either to the right hand or to the left; so that he may continue long in his kingdom, he and his children, in Israel." (Deuteronomy 17:18-20, RSV)

Too often in this fallen world, kings are corrupted by their power and glory, and they turn from serving the people to serving themselves. And rather than carry the people all the days of their lives, they come to ride on the back of their people.

But when Jesus comes again as King of kings and Lord of lords, this abuse of authority shall end. Bad governors will repent and be sent off to do more wholesome work, and Jesus himself shall reign at every point of authority in this world.

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<sup>3</sup> The Lectionary Commentary: Theological Exegesis for Sunday's Texts, The First Readings:: The Old Testament and Acts: 001 (Kindle Locations 6923-6925). Kindle Edition.

## **THE WARTBURG**

Let me quickly mention a fourth case of how nice it will be when Christ the King comes to our world. I am thinking of the Wartburg – the Lutheran retirement community in Mt. Vernon, New York where my wife, Carol, is Chaplain. Sunday mornings there are one of the most beautiful sites around, because half the congregation ministers to the other half. They are nearly all elderly folk. But some of them are mobile and some not. So those who can walk, walk to the nursing home and push people confined to wheelchairs to the Chapel for worship. And at the end of the service, they repeat the process, moving people back into the nursing home.

Well, when Christ the King comes, I bet he will join in the pushing of people to the Chapel. That will nice, to be pushed along by Jesus. And I kidded Carol that then she will be able to preach to Jesus, because he will be sitting there in her pews. But she said, “Oh, no! That’s not going to happen. I mean to yield the pulpit to Jesus.”

In any case, things are going to be better when Jesus comes again. And I say, the sooner, the better.

But, of course, this all means that you and I might well be among those who are in for a life-changing encounter with Christ the King. For *we* are the ones who might be told by Jesus that we are to get up from the front seat, give it to the elderly person standing there, and move to the back of the bus. We might be the ones who are told by Jesus that it is high time that we become more generous and mindful of others in the use of our money. And we are the ones who might in various ways need to be taught entirely new ways and notions of exercising the authority in this world that has been entrusted to us.

## **STREETS OF GOLD**

I love the book of Revelation’s vision of the gates of pearl and the streets of gold in the heavenly Jerusalem. But I tell you this: I would settle for the New York City we have here and now if only Christ the King were here to govern our town and to govern our hearts. As the elderly say, Come, Lord Jesus. Come soon! And let us begin living for this coming King even now, being sensible folk who prepare ourselves for the truth of things and the way things are going to be. Then we will be able to work toward the city that is indeed coming: a city of peace and compassion and joyful work, a city that is a blessing for all its people, and a city that rejoices to have Jesus of Nazareth as Christ the King, to whom belongs the glory, with the Father and the Holy Spirit now and forever. Amen.