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

My opening text comes from our First Lesson, from Daniel 7. It is a passage meant to comfort the bruised and battered people of God. It speaks of a coming king— a king appointed by God to rule forever. The prophet Daniel’s wonderful words go this way:

13 As I watched in the night visions,
    I saw one like a human being
    coming with the clouds of heaven.
    And he came to the Ancient One
    and was presented before him.

14 To him was given dominion
    and glory and kingship,
    that all peoples, nations, and languages
    should serve him.
    His dominion is an everlasting dominion
    that shall not pass away,
    and his kingship is one
    that shall never be destroyed. (Daniel 7:13-14, NRSV)

Therefore, I conclude, things are going to get better for government on earth. And political discourse is going to become more gentle and civil, and the human heart is going to be able to leave off its bitterness and at last live in a world in which there is peace on earth and goodwill among human beings. Better times are coming.

This good vision of Daniel follows upon four awful visions. He dreams of beasts – four of them. Each beast seems more terrible than the one before. Let me mention, say, the second beast to give you a feel for what they are like. At first glance this beast seems to be a bear—but it is a pretty awful bear. Listen to its description:

And behold, another beast, a second one, like a bear. It was raised up on one side; it had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth; and it was told, “Arise, devour much flesh.” (Daniel 7:5, RSV)
I do not like this idea—this image of a bear with ribs in its mouth and under orders to “Arise, devour much flesh.” This speaks of devastation. It is a threatening image.

Bible scholars say that Daniel’s four beasts refer to four fierce empires threatening Israel. Footnotes in The New Jerusalem Bible explain that the four beasts refer to the Babylonian Empire, the kingdom of the Medes, the Persian Empire, and the Greek empire of Alexander the Great and his successors. However that might be, the Holy Spirit intends Daniel’s vision about the Ancient of Days and the king to whom he gives dominion forever... the Spirit intends for that vision to comfort the people of God throughout the ages of these troubled times until at last the vision comes true. And when it comes true, you and I will know this great and final king. Why, he is our Saviour Jesus. He is the one we love and try to walk with and try to walk in his spirit. This great and final Sunday of the church year, Christ the King Sunday, invites us to look at our Jesus from a certain perspective - a political perspective: Jesus is King of kings and Lord of lords, forever!

The vision granted to Daniel is designed to be definitive. Elements of the vision of the one Daniel calls “the Ancient of Days” powerfully express the idea that this transition in political leadership is forever. It is eternal. This is not a king who will be unseated four years down the road. In Daniel’s vision we are permitted a glimpse of our Maker’s resolve and determination concerning government on earth. Notice some of the details in Daniel’s vision. His vision goes this way:

\[\text{Daniel 7:9-10, RSV}\]

That is a wonderfully dramatic closing line: “… and the books were opened.” Now let me tell you something about those books: if you are baptized, if your name is written in the baptismal registry here at Immanuel or some other church, and if you are living in Christ then your name is safe and sound in those heavenly books. “Saved!” Your name [speak your name to yourself] is
listed in the saved column. And I say, let us not remove our names from that column by walking away from Jesus.

The details about the Ancient of Days are magnificent, designed to leave no doubt but that we are talking about eternity—we are talking about the way things really shall be. His throne is fiery flames, like a chariot with wheels of burning fire. A thousand thousands serve him. Angels galore are at his command. He doesn’t really need them. He could simply give a command and it would be so. But there they stand — a thousand, thousand angels ready to fulfill his commands.

This Ancient of Days installs a king. The adjectives all express the stability and eternity of this king. All peoples shall serve him. His dominion is an everlasting. His kingdom shall never be destroyed. Kings and potentates and tyrants throughout the ages have raged and roared and all passed away. But this King shall not pass away. Our world must adjust to him because he is not going away. And it will be a good adjustment. Humanity shall be happy with this adjustment.

Imagine what things will be like on this earth when Jesus comes again, with beauty and power, and takes up the throne as our King of Kings and Lord of lords. All other kings and rulers and presidents and Supreme Court justices are just going to have to step aside. They are going to say to Jesus, “Here Jesus, take my seat.”

And Jesus shall not be the kind of King who rests in the palace. Rather he will be out and about transforming every level of government, even our families. I used the following image in a summertime sermon a few years back, but I like it and so I use it again now. When Jesus is installed as Christ the King, he shall be out and about in the city. He shall step on a city bus, for example, and suddenly he will make the indifference and the discourtesy of that bus better. If a young person is sitting in the front seats meant for the frail elderly, and if there is a frail elderly person standing nearby who could really use one of those seats, then Jesus will explain to the young person that he or she will be at his best if he were to stand up and give his seat to the elderly person. If you or I were to try that, we might get punched in the nose! And we know that and so often we do not even try to talk with our neighbors. But Jesus will have a kind of authority and winsomeness and power of speech that will transform that bus. He will make it a more civil and courteous little community.

Likewise Jesus shall come striding into the town halls across the land and into the national congresses and the impressive courts and into every arena in which political decisions are made and he will make those gathering much better. He will make them more just and loving and more peaceful. He will make them a joy for the participants so that they will say to themselves, “At last we are getting on track. At last we are functioning as a governmental authority ought to function.” Corruption, bribes, inefficiency, ignorance, a lack
of feel for what is important... all these negative things will be banished from civil discourse. Neighbors will be able to talk happily with one another about how things are going in our land and in every land.

I say, Let these good times come! Let Jesus soon be installed as Earth’s King of Kings and Lord of lords.

Now let me remind you of Martin Luther’s explanation of the Second Petition of the Lord’s Prayer. You know that second petition. It goes like this: “Thy kingdom come.” In his Small Catechism, Luther explains that in this petition we are praying for that good day when Jesus is installed as King of kings and Lord of lords, and this world’s buses and Congresses and courts all become better. So we are praying for that, for the coming of Christ’s Kingdom. But Luther explains that we are also praying for something else: we are praying for ourselves here and now. Luther’s brief explanation goes this way:

May your kingdom come.

What is this? Answer:
In fact, God’s kingdom comes on its own without our prayer, but we ask in this prayer that it may also come to us. (Kolb/Wengert edition)

What does it mean, that God’s kingdom might also come “to us”? Luther gives this answer:

Whenever our heavenly Father gives us his Holy Spirit, so that through his grace we believe his Holy Word and live godly lives here in time and hereafter in eternity.

Putting it all together, we get this: when we pray “thy kingdom come” we are praying both that Christ shall someday be installed as King of kings and Lord of lords, and that even now you and I will acknowledge him as being our King. We want nothing more in these three score and ten years than that we should serve Jesus now as our King and enjoy his protection now and hereafter in eternity.

And this brings me at last to the Hymn of the Day we sang just a little while ago, before this sermon. It is the evening hymn, The Day You Gave Us, Lord, Has Ended (LBW 274). It is a hymn about the many people on earth who already count Jesus to be their king, just as Luther wanted. The hymn refers to the fact that dawn is breaking somewhere on our globe all the time. And that means that Morning Prayer in the monasteries and convents and churches is being sung just about all the time. And so we have this verse:

As to each continent and island
The dawn leads on another day,
The voice of prayer is never silent,
Nor dies the strain of praise away.

This past summer, when we sang this hymn during a Sunday evening Compline service here at Immanuel, Margaret Schulze and I got to talking about what a great hymn this would be for Christ the King Sunday. The hymn speaks of this world’s “proud empires.” The hymn prefers the everlasting kingdom of Jesus Christ. The final verse, then, goes this way:

So be it, Lord; your realm shall never,
Like earth’s proud empires, pass away,
But stand and grow and rule forever,
Till all your creatures own your sway.

Sometimes, when we are feeling down in the dumps and rather lonely, we might think that we are among the last Christians on earth — that the church is getting smaller and smaller and risks fading away. Not so! the hymn reminds us. The “voice of prayer is never silent” and songs of praise never die away. They are many people across the earth who own God’s sway. There are many people who already count Jesus Christ as their King. Let us always be among them, till that great and awesome day, when Jesus comes again, this time as King of the Universe, forever and ever. To him, Christ the King, belongs the glory, with the Father and the Holy Spirit now and forever. Amen.