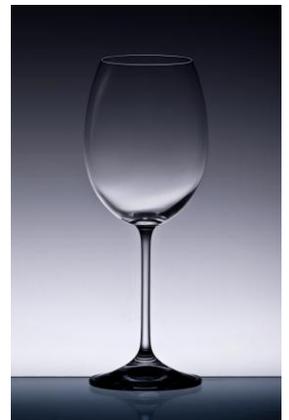


“Emptied”

1. Growing up, any mention of kings or queens meant something far away, a long ago story.
  - a. We heard in school in Mexico about King Ferdinand and Queen Isabelle of Spain who sent Columbus on an expedition
    - i. Spoiler alert, he got lost, and what he did find he destroyed with genocide against native peoples and indiscriminate plundering of natural resources
    - ii. Mexico gained independence from the King and Queen of Spain in 1821
    - iii. That was a very complicated story to tell in Mexico, since to this day we speak the language of those conquerors, and people like myself trace lineage both to the Europeans and to local native peoples.
  - b. In the United States I learned about King James I and later King George III of Great Britain.
    - i. Again, similarly distressing actions by a conquering European army, creating a genocide and displacement of native peoples.
    - ii. The United States gained independence from the King of Great Britain in 1783
    - iii. A complicated story to tell, especially when you think about how as an independent country, the US continued its expansion westward, again with deadly consequences for native peoples and natural resources.
  - c. If it wasn't about kings and queens from history, any other mention of monarchs was about the ones in fables and other stories
    - i. Those kings and queens seemed to be either really good or really evil.
    - ii. Sometimes they went from being evil to becoming good
  - d. Oh, there was another reference I remember growing up. And this one was in church
    - i. As a young kid, I remember hearing my sisters sing with the church choir the Hallelujah Chorus in Handel's Messiah, referring to Jesus: “King of Kings and Lord of Lords, and he shall reign for ever and ever”
    - ii. But because it was Jesus, well, I figured it couldn't be a bad king, or a mean king, or a king that killed innocent people.
    - iii. So Jesus was king. Or maybe it was God who was King? I was little, I don't remember.
  - e. I bring up all this language of monarchs because today is the Sunday in the church calendar known as Christ the King Sunday, which is also now known as Reign of Christ Sunday or Majesty of Christ Sunday

- i. There are many biblical references to Jesus as Ruler and King
  - ii. Traditionally, some of the Bible passages for this Sunday focus on a very exalted view of Jesus as being in charge – and the title of King makes it like an ultimate way of lifting Jesus up.
  - iii. But there are other traditional Bible passages for this Sunday that are actually quite the opposite: using the passages when Jesus was crucified and the title on the cross, above his head read: “the King of the Jews” which was a way to mock Jesus in his final hour.
  - iv. That makes us think about what we really mean when we say “King” or “Ruler”
  - v. We acknowledge, then, that there is intentional tension between those two types of passages in the Bible.
  - vi. They’re both there to help us think that Jesus is a different kind of monarch, one whose definition of power and authority upset our human understanding of what a ruler would be (again, what King dies on the cross?).
  - vii. But because he’s a different kind of ruler, and approaches power in a way that’s hard for us to wrap our heads around, all we have to do is point to Easter morning when we celebrate that he was raised in power, and defeated death, and sin, and injustice.
  - viii. Which means we keep using the imagery of King but we have to remind ourselves its not like any other Ruler we’ve known.
2. Because of the complex picture of what a Ruler is, I decided to pick an entirely different perspective, using this Philippians passage to help us explore that idea of the Majesty of Jesus from another angle
- a. There is a lot in this passage to focus on, but I want to draw our attention to just a tiny, little, but powerful word: emptied.
    - i. The passage says of Jesus that he “emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness; then being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross...”
    - ii. The graphic for today’s bulletin and for the slides is that of an empty crystal wine glass, to help us picture the concept.
    - iii. But it doesn’t do it justice.
    - iv. This emptiness in the passage is not the emptiness of
      - 1. Having nothing, lacking resources
      - 2. Sadness and despair
      - 3. Of a void to be filled
      - 4. Of being exhausted, out of gas, completely spent, having nothing else to give



- v. It is instead the emptiness which comes from
  1. letting go of privilege
  2. becoming vulnerable
  3. choosing to use love instead of raw power to impact people
- vi. when that ancient hymn speaks of Jesus emptying himself, those who were singing in those house churches in Greece could relate to the image of Jesus
  1. A Jesus who didn't stay on a throne, but became one of us
  2. Who didn't force people to "be good" but embraced us with forgiveness
- b. We acknowledge the unique role and story line of Jesus
  - i. The passage is not asking us to follow Jesus to our own physical cross and the horrific death he underwent
  - ii. But instead it asks us to choose the kind of "emptying" that Jesus undertook, so as Paul writes:
    1. We will "Do nothing from self-interest, but in humility regard others as better than [ourselves]. Each of [us] , look not to [our] own interests, but rather to the interests of others."
  - iii. In other words, to let that notion of emptying oneself be the way in which we connect with those who are around us who find themselves pushed to the margins
  - iv. After all, that's where Jesus came, as Ruler but not trying to Lord it over us
    1. Jesus didn't go live in castle and sit on a golden throne
    2. Instead he lived a life of a humble carpenter
    3. And when he started to teach, he sought out those who had already been rejected by the powerful in the religious and political and cultural arenas
- 3. You and I don't have thrones to come down from, or crowns to abdicate. But the message of that ancient hymn challenges us to consider the power and impact of Jesus from a challenging perspective of humility
  - a. Jesus's example to us is one of grace instead of power-over, of "because I love you" not "because I said so"
  - b. The radical love of Jesus, and the way in which he redefined power through emptying himself, continues to go against the grain throughout our culture today
    - i. That's true in governments local and national, or businesses (just think about show-off displays of power or business tactics to eliminate the competition!)

- ii. That's true of cultural expectations, the implied underbelly of "the American Dream" (blaming the poor for being poor instead of considering how we've all let them down as neighbors!)
    - iii. That's true even in the church actually (just think about all those preachers who proclaim that being blessed financially is the sign of God's favor for us!)
  - c. Consider the radical advice Paul gave those people in Greece all those years ago, and realize that it was as hard then as it is now:
    - i. Do nothing from self-interest, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves... look not to your own interests, but rather to the interests of others.
    - ii. I've seen dear saints of the church struggle with this.
    - iii. They ask me: "But people will take advantage of us" or "It won't show people responsibility for their actions."
    - iv. The way Jesus showed us how to live with each other wasn't a dog-eat-dog world, but one where the lion lays down with the lamb.
    - v. We hold no delusion that is an easy or risk free perspective, of course.
    - vi. All we have to do is recognize the way in which Jesus himself was treated when he sought to be with those on the margins, and invited (demanded!) that those who followed him also join him supporting those whom society was actively rejecting.
    - vii. Think about who all that would be today.
    - viii. Picture Jesus walking down our streets. Who would he teach and feed by the thousands at Mill Race park? Who would be seated with him at a long table in someone's living room?
    - ix. How quickly would it happen that the FBI would open a file to bring him down? Or how quickly would ICE target some of his followers – maybe even himself?
    - x. How would national and international media try to make sense of this charismatic teacher from a small Midwest town, who was reportedly preaching "repent... love your enemies... blessed are the peacemakers...?"
    - xi. Today, just as then, his disarming perspective would have been seen as threatening for stirring up those who were poor and powerless. Today, just as then, he would have been labeled a traitor and executed by the state.
    - xii. All because Jesus emptied himself, let go of his privilege, sought to love others and refused to let people be erased by those in power.
- 4. Let the same mind be in us that was in Christ Jesus. Let the same humility, compassion, fearlessness and love live in us.