

## Christ the King, C

Some of you may remember a kids' game called King of the Hill. You would run outside, find a dirt pile, a big rock, a tree stump – anything you could climb up on. The first kid to the top of the rock or dirt pile would claim his kingdom and shout, **“I am king of the hill.”** The rest of the players would charge the kingdom. Some tried pulling the king down. Others tried pushing the king off the hill. Everybody wanted to take over the kingdom.

Each attack on the king was in some way an unspoken demand for proof. **“If you are really the king, prove it. Defend yourself. Show us your power and strength. Save yourself and your kingdom. Because if you don't, I will take it for myself.”** Each player wanted to climb the dirt pile and yell, **“I am king of the hill.”**

It is a great game. It brings a lot of fun. There is a problem, though. You see, the kids grew up, but we never stopped playing the game. We became adults, and the game became a way of life.

Our dirt piles became success, money, power and control, and reputation and popularity. For some, the dirt piles became our families, our children, or the fairy tale of living happily ever after. Others climb the dirt piles of being right, holy, or patriotic. Often, our dirt piles became ways of thinking, political parties, or social groups. Our nation and even our church have become **“king of the hill”** playgrounds.

There are all sorts of kingdoms. Each one of us can probably name the dirt piles of our lives, the dirt piles on which we have played king or queen of the hill. The adult version of King of the Hill is about filling our emptiness, confronting our fears, and ultimately establishing some form of order and control in our lives. What began as a child's game has become the reality of our lives. For many of us, life is a constant scrambling to establish and maintain our little kingdoms, to convince ourselves as much as anyone else that we are okay, we are enough, we are the king or queen. That is a hard way to live.

Today, the Feast of Christ the King, celebrates and reminds us that playing king of the hill need not be the final reality of our lives. Life can be different. We do not have to spend our lives trying to get to the top of a three-foot pile of dirt. We do not have to spend our lives trying to keep our balance on top of a lifeless rock. Christ the King invites us to stop playing the game. Life does not have to be, was never intended to be, an ongoing game of king of the hill.

If we choose to stop playing the game, it means we must give up our little kingdoms. We cannot celebrate Christ the King and continue fighting our way up the dirt pile. We can have one or the other, but not both. Today, we will again pray, **“Thy kingdom come.”** It rolls off our tongues with ease and familiarity. But I wonder if we really know what we are asking for, and whether we really mean it? Implicit in that prayer is the request, **“my kingdom go.” “Thy kingdom come, my kingdom go.”**

It is one thing to pray for God's kingdom to come. It is another to let our kingdom go. After all, we have been king of our own hills for a long time. Or at least we have convinced ourselves that we have. It is not easy to let go of our kingdoms, and more often than not, I think we try to negotiate a deal with God. **“Ok, God. Prove you are the king, and then I will step down. Show me evidence of your kingdom, and then I will let go of mine.”**

The leaders, the soldiers, one of the criminals – they all want the same thing. They want to see proof that Christ is the King. They want to see evidence of his kingdom. We all do. After all, if Jesus is really the king, the one to rule our lives, and if we are supposed to believe that, then let him prove it. **“If you are King of the Jews, save yourself. Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us.”**

At one level, we want to see Jesus come down from the cross. We want to see his wounds disappear. We want to see a well-dressed king – one with physical strength, military might, and political power. We want to see something spectacular, something beyond the realities of our ordinary life. At a much deeper level, however, these demands are about more than just Jesus saving himself from death, from physical pain, from political defeat. At a deeper level, we are crying out: **“Save yourself and us from our own unbelief. Save yourself and us from our need to control. Save yourself and us from the fear that this little pile of dirt I call my**

**kingdom is all there is to my life. Show me. Right now. Prove who you are.”**

But he would not do it – at least not in the way we usually want. Jesus will not offer us proof of his kingship. Instead, he offers us the kingdom. He invites us to share his kingship. That happens in the silence of deep love. The leaders are scoffing at Jesus. He responds with silence. The soldiers are mocking him. He responds with silence. One of the criminals ridicules him. He responds with silence. All are demanding proof. None is getting what they ask for. Jesus does not take himself or the criminals off the cross. He doesn't answer the leaders. He refuses to respond to the soldiers. He is silent.

In that silence, the other criminal begins to understand. It is not about getting proof of Christ's kingship – it is about letting go of our own kingship. It is about coming down from our little piles of dirt and realizing that we already are, and always have been, royal members of God's holy kingdom. This realization underlies the criminal's cry, **“Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom. Remember me not because of what I have done or left undone. Remember, despite those things. Remember me not because of who I am but because of who you are.”** His cry to be remembered is the cry of one who has emptied himself of everything, has let go of every kingdom, and whose very life and existence are entrusted to the God who remembers. That is the reign of Christ.

**My Dear Brothers and Sisters,**

The reign of Christ does not mean we now have all the answers, that everything is fixed, that there is no more pain, or that every problem has been eliminated. Jesus will not take us off our crosses. Instead, he gets up there with us. He does not fix our lives. Instead, he enters the reality of our ordinary existence. We are remembered and right there, in the reality of our everyday life, in the midst of our pain, in the midst of our dying, in the midst of our brokenness, in the midst of our guilt, Christ the King says to us, **“Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.”**  
**Amen.**