

Royal choice: Revelation 1:4b-8

by [Keith D. Herron](#) in the [November 14, 2006](#) issue

Envision this scene: A high-profile pastor passionately describes what the kingdom would be like if political leaders committed to God were elected. He calls it the God Ticket. As he speaks, the Jumbo-Tron screen towering above the choir loft displays a montage of pictures of a particular candidate in a variety of engaging poses meant to lead the viewers to trust him and vote for him. There's no need to mention the candidate's name—the pictures tell the story and etch into the worshipers' minds the notion that this particular candidate is God's choice. All we have to do is attend the coronation by casting our vote.

Royal crowns rattle in the church's cupboard every election year. What's the reason for this fascination? Perhaps it's based on a lust for raw political power. Perhaps the unreserved endorsement of candidates who support "faith-based" political platforms stems from the anxiety that pervades our time and our culture. Or perhaps we are holding on to our fantasies of a royal world that's long since disappeared.

While there is no royal family in the American political system, the political stars of our time exert royal power. We are very much the heirs of others who loved royalty—such as the elders of Israel who begged Samuel to appoint a king to govern them so they would be like all the other nations. But kingly rule does not come without cost: Samuel reported God's warning that their sons and daughters would be conscripted to serve the king. No wonder the prophets are filled with talk about idolatries and misdirected loyalties, not to mention their pronouncements about the cost of sacrificing children as pawns of the state.

The last week of the Christian year is meant to focus worshipers on the sole source of divine power and reign. Christ the King Sunday is a day in which the people of faith are invited to the throne room where Christ is exalted and worshiped; it is the New Year's Eve of the Christian year, the day we come full circle and end a journey that began with the first Sunday in Advent. On this day we think of the entire Christian year, of our faith, of creation, of history, of the God who is all in all, and of the Christ who will rule over all. We think of the coming end of time and we submit to Christ as our sovereign, believing with Paul that "every knee shall bow and every

tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God” (Phil. 2:10-11).

On this Sunday I long to worship in a massive Gothic cathedral with trumpeters in the balconies and bright banners hanging from the rafters, with attendants in festive costumes lining the walls and a royal entourage surrounding a great throne. Perhaps we could stretch our imagination and replace the pulpit in our own sanctuaries with an elegant chair as a kind of symbolic throne for this occasion. Then we would invite the worshipers to imagine the Lord Jesus Christ enthroned in our midst. John’s vision helps us imagine him surrounded by the apostles robed in white for extra effect. In our imagination we see this as a day when mere mortals have an audience with the Lord of life. What would you say to him? Better yet, what would he say to you?

In the days before the exile, the ancient Jews gathered once a year in the temple to crown Yahweh as God to symbolize God’s rule over all the people. It was worship directed vertically, just as the smoke of the incense ascended to the highest reaches of the vaulted ceiling, accompanied by the smell of burning sacrifices and the music echoing in the rafters. All of this was meant to symbolize the deepest intentions of the prayerful faithful.

How do we re-create that vivid experience of worship, that heightened awareness of God’s presence? How do we communicate the image and the feeling of these sacred words from John’s revelation that proclaim Christ king? There’s no clearer image of the kingship of Christ than in John’s powerful images of vindication and triumph. In this passage, essentially a prayer, John envisions the power of a Jesus who “is coming with the clouds.” The prayer is both tender and terrifying. Jesus stands at the beginning and end of all time and in between all things.

Yet perhaps the heightened sense of God’s presence is best found outside the sanctuary, where Jesus is king not in places of power, but in places where people try to serve him. Perhaps we will see him most vividly not among those who choose violence as a solution, but among those who practice peace-filled solutions. Yes, Jesus is king not where people seek advantage, but where people seek to be helpful; not where people seek security, but in a working and breathing community.

This is good news. If Jesus is king not just once a year and on a throne but throughout all of time and in every place, then we don’t have to be king, or seek another king. We no longer have to judge one another. We don’t have to control what other people think and feel or force them to fit our expectations. When that

happens, the kingdom of God is here and now, here in our hearts, here among us—and out there wherever we carry it.

It's a liberating idea. In an election year, we need no "God-is-on-my-side" claims. We need only to yield to the power of that for-all-time claim.