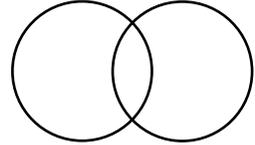


## Shapes and Kings November 20, 2022

My daughter is learning her shapes. She's got circle down so far (which she calls "ball"), which we count as a win... we're working on squares and triangles.

So shapes are on my mind. Today I'd like to talk about our Gospel through the lens of shapes.

The first shape is: circle. Do you remember Venn diagrams from school? Venn diagrams consist of two overlapping circles, and they are used to look at the similarities and differences between two things.



Animals that have beaks/bills | Animals that have fur  
Center: duck-billed platypus

Eating too much | Awkward conversations with distant relatives  
Center: Thanksgiving and Christmas

Talents I have | Talents that make money  
(There is no overlap)

Kings and rulers of Jesus' day | Jesus  
Common: called "kings"

Roman, Hebrew, and most other rulers in Jesus' day:

- most powerful person in society
- self-focused; energy goes into keeping self safe
- rule enforced by fear – "If you disobey, you get punished"

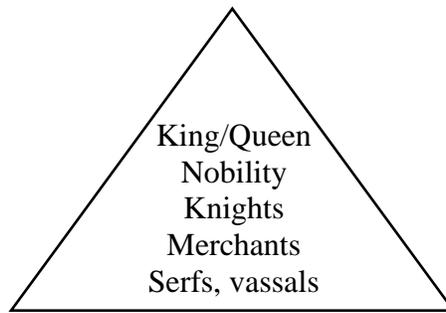
Jesus, on the other hand, is a very different kind of king or ruler:

- not powerful in society (as least not by normal standards)
- focused not on self, but on others
- rule, kingship is based on love and inclusion ("the love of God is for you too"). That is what draws people to Jesus, rather than intimidation

Today, we celebrate the reign of Christ or "Christ the King Sunday." In doing so, we honor a very different type of king than what the world has known.

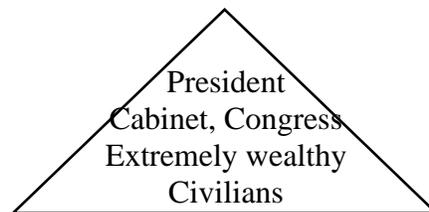
I think we can see the difference with the help of another shape: triangles.

In middle school and high-school history class, we looked at the structure of society as a triangle.

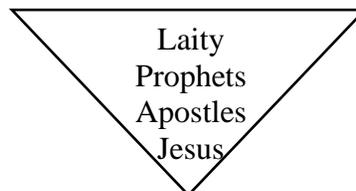


Power flows up. The people at the top of the triangle are the fewest in number and hold the most power.

We have the same basic system in our government and society today.



The triangle of Jesus' kingdom is a bit different.



This is why we call Jesus' realm "the upside-down kingdom." All the power structures that we know are turned on their head. Jesus conveys this in saying things like, "The last shall be first, and the first shall be last." "Those who would be greatest must be servant of all." It is a different set of rules that this kingdom is built on.

That upside-down kingdom is embodied in the last shape: the cross. The cross is the epitome of Jesus' upside-down reign. It is a statement of sacrificial love, of powerlessness, of emptying oneself for others. We hear in the Gospel story everyone yelling at Jesus, saying, "If you're the son of God, save yourself and others." They are telling him to come down from the cross. The irony, the upside-downness, is that salvation comes from Jesus staying on the cross.

And the other piece of irony is the sign above Jesus' head. It's meant to be cruel mockery. "This is the king of the Jews." It's saying: "Here's what happens when someone claims to be king against the Roman emperor." The irony is that the sign speaks the truth. A king is here.

And the most powerful moment in this scene for me is the conversation between the criminal and Jesus. This is the end. Jesus has done all that he came to do. And a criminal, who by his own admission deserves the death penalty, asks for a measure of grace. "Remember me in your kingdom." Now Jesus owes nothing to this man. He doesn't know him. But Jesus, in his final words, says, "The love of God is for you too." That's become my new summary of the Gospel of Luke.

This kingdom, my kingdom, Jesus says, has a place for even the worst sinners. It's a place where there's forgiveness for murderers. It's a place where no one is beyond the love of God.

It's to that kingdom that we belong, first and foremost. Yes, we are also Americans; we are citizens in this world. But our first allegiance is to Christ our King.

I'd encourage you to pay attention this week to how we talk about our rulers in the news. Think of political leaders (Presidents, Congressmen and -women, Governors, mayors); and think about business leaders (with the deals with Twitter, for example).

Often when there is a change in leadership, we talk about ushering in a new age, for good or for ill. And if we like the leader, we put a lot of hope on his/her shoulders.

All leaders are imperfect. All leaders are human. We can only do so much. And so it's worth remembering, as we support and critique our leaders, that there is one leader who is above others. There is one ruler who showed us a counter-cultural way to live, a way that spreads life and second chances.

That leader, that king, is a preacher from Galilee who believed that the love of God was for everyone. And he believed it so strongly that he reaffirmed it with his final breaths. That's a king that I want to follow.

Amen.

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