

Sermon: King of Righteousness and Peace

(Preached by the Rev. Paul Wu, at St. Giles, Ottawa, Dec. 7, 2025)

This sermon is inspired by the reflection *The Text Behind the Tunes*, by Rev. Dr. Patricia Dutcher-Walls, the now retired professor of Hebrew Bible and the Moderator of the 2024 General Assembly, in dialogue with Hymn 110 and 115 of the PCC Book of Praise.

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable to you. O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

Did you happen to catch the coronation of King Charles III of the United Kingdom back in May of 2023. It was the most watched television broadcast of that year, with a supposedly global audience of 2 billion people across 125 countries. The event itself was apparently planned for years during the reign of Queen Elizabeth II, having an actual code name: Operation Golden Orb. And boy, did it not disappoint—you can always count on the British monarchy to put on pomp and circumstance, with a ceremony that is truly impressive, elaborate and magnificent.

The actual coronation was conducted by the Church of England, presided by the Archbishop of Canterbury, and structured around a service of Holy Communion. The King and Queen first proceeded into the Westminster Abbey. Then Charles was presented to the people and recognized as king. After this Charles took an oath, he was then anointed with holy oil, invested with the coronation regalia, and crowned with St. Edward's Crown.

The statutory accession declaration he made was somewhat different. Gone was the language of denunciation of Catholicism. What remains in the oath as uttered by Charles, had him swearing to govern each of his countries according to their respective laws and customs, to administer law and justice with mercy, and to uphold Protestantism in the United Kingdom and protect the Church of England.

The coronation ceremony embodied a high ideal, upholding righteousness and peace as the king, while acknowledging the existence of multiple faiths and beliefs in the United Kingdom. It is a service befitting a 21st century monarch. If you happen to have missed it, you could still retrieve it on YouTube. It worth a watch, in my opinion. Given the long reign of the previous monarch, some of us may not get the chance to see another royal coronation from the House of Windsor.

In our responsive reading today, Psalm 72 was probably used as a coronation hymn for the Davidic king in the temple in Jerusalem. Like royal hymns from other states in the ancient world, it celebrates the righteousness and glory of the king, invoking images of the king as the bringer of peace, justice and wealth. As we read in its opening verse,

*“Give the king your justice, O God,
and your righteousness to a king’s son.
May he judge your people with righteousness,
and your poor with justice.”*

So we sing in hymn 115, in its opening verse,

*“Hail to the Lord’s Anointed, great David’s greater Son;
hail, in the time appointed, his reign on earth begun!
He comes to break oppression, to set the captive free,
to take away transgression, and rule in equity.”*

As well in verse 4,

*“All powers shall bow before him, and gold and incense bring;
all nations shall adore him, his praise all people sing,
for he shall have dominion over river, sea and shore,
far as the eagle’s pinion or dove’s light wing can soar.”*

The psalm invokes the blessing of God on the ruler who was in fact the central power of the state, and expresses the hope that the king would embody the blessings of God for those he ruled. It especially mentioned the king’s role as the protector of the poor and vulnerable. As we read in verse 4 of this psalm,

*“May he defend the cause of the poor of the people,
give deliverance to the needy, and crush the oppressor.”*

So we sing in verse 2 in hymn 115,

*“He brings salvation speedy to those who suffer wrong;
he saves the poor and needy, and helps the weak be strong;
they sing who once were sighing, their darkness turned to light,
for they, who once were dying, are precious in his sight.”*

Such language about the just king in this psalm is balanced in the Hebrew Bible as a whole by the equally forceful words of prophets who saw

the actions of kings a bit differently. They saw and understood that kings could be the sources of injustice, greed, and arrogance; their oracles were also preserved as the word of God.

If Psalm 72 expresses and celebrates the ideal king, Isaiah of Jerusalem painted a different picture. The people of God who lived on the land in Israel and Judah often found themselves overwhelmed by the larger nations around them in the ancient world.

In the years around 750 BCE, the Assyrian empire was on the move toward conquest that could guarantee them wealth and power, using terrible siege warfare and ruling by terror and threat. The set of Assyrian palace reliefs narrating the siege of Lachish, a city just outside of Jerusalem, tells the story of Sennacherib, the mighty king of Assyria, sitting on the throne of judgement, at the entrance of the city, giving permission for its slaughter. The Assyrian royal rhetoric of world domination made claims to be the establisher of justice and ruler of all the lands through the power of their great king, favoured of the gods.

A prophet to the court of the king in Judah saw a different reality. Isaiah of Jerusalem announced the coming of a king who would rule on the Davidic throne, perhaps a reference to King Hezekiah who kept his throne and his head intact through the years of Assyrian warfare. As we read in Isaiah 37:6-7,

*“Thus says the Lord: Do not be afraid
because of the words that you have heard,
with which the servants of the king of Assyria have reviled me.
I myself will put a spirit in him,
so that he shall hear a rumour and return to his own land;
I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own land.”*

And in verse 35 of the same chapter declared the Lord,

*“For I will defend this city to save it,
for my own sake and for the sake of my servant David.”*

This same message from Isaiah resonated as good news in the exile 150 years later when the people had lost both king and kingdom. And that same message took on yet new meaning in the post-exilic period when anticipation for a righteous king of David's line became the root of messianic expectations that carried the people's hopes through centuries of oppression and longing. As we read in Isaiah 11:1-2,

*“A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse,
and a branch shall grow out of his roots.
The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him,
the spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the spirit of counsel and might,
the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.”*

So we sing in hymn 110, verse 1

“Come, thou long-expected Jesus, born to set thy people free;
from our fears and sins release us; let us find our rest in thee.
Israel’s strength and consolation, hope of all the earth thou art,
dear desire of every nation, joy of every longing heart.”

The anticipation in Psalm 72 and the expectation of Isaiah 11 thus converge, for a king of righteousness and peace that we find in a child-like king. As we read in Isaiah 11:6,

*“The wolf shall live with the lamb;
the leopard shall lie down with the kid;
the calf and the lion will feed together,
and a little child shall lead them.”*

So we sing in hymn 110, verse 2

“Born thy people to deliver; born a child and yet a king,
born to reign in us forever; now thy gracious kingdom bring.
By thine own eternal Spirit, rule in all our hearts alone;
by thine all sufficient merit, raise us to thy glorious throne.”

Such hope now lives in us, through centuries of faithful witnesses who surround us like clouds. They sing to us, they sing with us, their singings merge with ours into a glorious crescendo as we anticipate and participate in the coming of this child-king. First in a humble manger, then in time, and the time is coming when he shall come on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory, that all knees shall bend and all tongues shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord and King,

To the glory of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**