**Psalm 2** January 5, 2020

Pastor P. Martin **Faith Lutheran Church, Radcliff, KY** Christmas 2

*The full text will be read in the course of the sermon.*

Dear Friends who adore, who worship the Christ-Child,

It’s a new year! Here is my prediction for 2020: we are about to see an outbreak of baby kissing—we are in a presidential election year. Baby kissing has been a minor but persistent feature of presidential campaigns for a good long time. Supposedly, “the earliest recorded instance of a[n American] politician puckering up [for a baby] dates to 1833 when President Andrew Jackson toured New Jersey. As Jackson stopped to greet a mother and baby, the woman thrust her little boy into his arms. ‘Ah! There is a fine specimen of American childhood!’ declared the president, who then passed the dirty-faced infant over to Secretary of War John Eaton for him to kiss. While ‘Old Hickory’ outsourced the job, his successor, Martin Van Buren, reportedly kissed quite a few babies, and the tradition took off.”[[1]](#footnote-1) In our democratic system of governance, even the most serious leaders want, at times, to look like they have a tender spot for the young and innocent. We could use some tenderness is our politics.

This psalm today, in a very different way, mixes up some of those same themes. We hear of a child, a birth. We also hear about kings and rulers. And somewhere in the last verse it says, ***“Kiss the Son.”***

The Christmas story has some of those same themes. Christmas also is about a baby, one who is going to take the throne of his father David, worshiped by shepherds. So it is natural that this psalm is often chosen for the Christmas season.

The first words of the last verse of Psalm Two, say some especially evocative words: ***“Kiss the Son.”*** We think, “Of course you kiss the baby! They’re so cute!” But God has a different reason to kiss this baby boy. We might want to ask ourselves,

**Why Does God Want Us to “Kiss the Son”?**

**I.** Of course, not everyone wants to kiss babies. As we heard in our Gospel reading from Matthew, not every leader has a tender spot for the little ones. Herod’s reaction to a baby *“born king of the Jews”* made our blood curdle. To King Herod it didn’t matter if this child was God’s promised child. This child was in the way of his ambitions.

Herod’s reaction to God’s plans was not unique. Listen to the first verses of our reading:

*Psalm2:1Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain?  
 2The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together  
 against the Lord and against his Anointed One.  
 3“Let us break their chains,” they say, “and throw off their fetters.”*

These guys are the sort you hide your baby from! Herod was but one brutal, selfish example. The violent opposition Herod showed to God is still around. In our nation we can forget that. Our religious freedom is a blessing which easily makes us spiritually lazy. But in dozens of nations, leaders rage against the Lord Almighty and His people. In China in recent years, the president of that nation has removed displays of the Ten Commandments from many churches and replaced them with his own ten wise sayings. In North Korea owning a Bible is punishable by 15 years in prison, but it usually results in something much much worse than a prison sentence. In other countries Christian converts are often found murdered in alleyways.

We are far removed from these extremes. But we still are exposed to spiritual animosity. In our own nation we know that traditional Christian teachings about sexuality are labelled as phobias and discrimination. God is quite clear that homosexuality is a sin, and that the whole trans-gender thing runs contrary to his design and desire for life. Unborn children’s lives are extinguished, and many who have the power to make laws insists that there is nothing wrong in this, that it is a right, that *you* should subsidize other people’s murders.

Verse two is not just a statement of how things were in 1000BC. It is a statement of the human condition in all times: ***“The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against his Anointed One.”***

Opposition to God’s Son can take a much quieter form. There was a rich young ruler—a man who at whom Jesus looked and loved—who was willing to do anything for Jesus as long as it conformed to his opinions. As soon as Jesus told him to do what he did not want to do, he walked away disillusioned. As surely as the kings who rage against God, this rich young ruler rejected God’s ways. (Mk 10:21)

That rich young man’s attitude is a sample of the overwhelming religious attitude of our time. In our day when we custom order everything from our vehicles to our hamburgers, people expect God and his church to do the same. They come in the door. They look, they watch, they listen. As soon as they find one or another distasteful teaching of Jesus, they walk away. They make that choice, not because they have searched and studied God’s word, but simply something made up out of their own heads: “I don’t think God would…” or “That sounds so unloving…”

But don’t get too uppity. That natural opposition to God’s rule is a voice that lives inside even most sincere, humble, Bible believing and reading Christian. If you don’t read your Bible, you don’t know what I mean. But read your Bible, read it straight from God, and one day you will be reading a Bible passage and you will hear a voice inside your head saying, “I don’t know that I can buy into that…” The voice is your own.

For humans, rebellion against God, is as natural as breathing. We want freedom, complete freedom. Freedom from people who tell us what to do. How much more we want freedom from the one who not only rules our actions but also our words and thoughts. Freedom from God is the most natural desire of our human nature. ***“‘Let us break their chains,’ they say, ‘and throw off their fetters.’”*** It’s out there in the world. It’s in here in our hearts.

**II.** Thankfully, God’s Holy Spirit wages war against our natural sinful selfishness. The Holy Spirit humbles us to submit ourselves to God. And by God’s grace alone, God’s good and gracious priorities become our priorities.

When we listen to God, I mean really submit ourselves and listen, we become like children and God like our Father.

You know how kids are about their parents. When you were a child, if someone ever said something insulting about your mom or dad, you got angry, you just about wanted to explode. Not for yourself, but for them. Like children, we jealously guard our heavenly Father’s honor. When we hear the kings of the earth rage against God, we grit our teeth. When we hear of newborns slain by Herod’s sword, or Christian churches torn down by godless governments, or anti-Christian taunts and tweets, our hearts burn. We go to our heavenly Father in prayer and we complain, “Did you see… How can they get away with…” This is God’s answer:

*4The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them.  
 5Then he rebukes them in his anger and terrifies them in his wrath, saying,  
 6“I have installed my King on Zion, my holy hill.”*

God looks at the attempts of the kings of the world to oppose him, and they look like temper tantrums of two-year-olds. There is no possible way they can thwart his plan. God laughs at them. He doesn’t laugh with them, he laughs at them because they will fail, they will fear him, and they will be punished.

After laughing at the futile efforts of the kings of this world, the Lord sets out his plan in verse six: ***“I have installed my King on Zion, my holy hill.”*** That King, called the Anointed One in verse two, is, of course, Jesus. God plan for humanity is wrapped up in him. He is the man. He is the plan. All other plans are rejections of God’s plan.

**III.** That King, the Anointed One speaks in the following verses:

*7I will proclaim the decree of the Lord:  
 He said to me, “You are my Son; today I have become your Father.  
 8Ask of me,  
 and I will make the nations your inheritance,   
 the ends of the earth your possession.  
 9You will rule them with an iron scepter;   
 you will dash them to pieces like pottery.”*

In verse 7 the Messiah says, ***“[The Lord] said to me, ‘You are my Son; today I have become your Father.’”*** These words call to mind the Christmas story. They call to mind the fact that Jesus called himself the Son of God, and that he called the first person of the Trinity God the Father.

But there is something special going on in these verses. You may know that the Old Testament, including the book of Psalms, was written in Hebrew. Now the part that is translated ***“I have become your Father”*** is very peculiar in the Hebrew. In older English we have two words “to bear” a child and “to beget” a child. “To bear” is the mother’s relationship to a child. “To beget” is the father’s relation to a child. The mother bears a child, the father begets. Now you would expect the word “beget” when God the Father is talking about God the Son. But in this verse it is the mother word, “to give birth to,” that is used. [[2]](#footnote-2) It is a marker saying that human vocabulary stumbles over this within the Trinity. It is something we can’t really reflect in a word. The second person of the Trinity didn’t come into being one silent night in Bethlehem. This verse does not express origin (for we confess “*eternally* begotten of the Father”), but a relationship. At any rate, the point is that even a thousand years before the first Christmas, God waved a flag to the ancient Israelites to get their attention that his promised Messiah would be quite different from any other human being.

Secondly, just as God the Father sits in heaven and laughs and scoffs at the ineffective opposition of people, so the Messiah ***“will rule [the nations] with an iron scepter [and] dash them to pieces like pottery.”***

Yes, Jesus did first appear in humility. He did come as a baby small enough to be cradled in the arms of Mary and Joseph and shepherds and Simeon and Anna, but he possesses the authority of God. He will rule, and as God the Father scoffs at his opponents, so the Son will judge and punish them with the power of an iron rod smashing a clay flower pot.

**IV.** After God the Father expresses his contempt for worldly people’s opposition, after God the Father has makes known his chosen one who will destroy all opposition completely and totally, we have the closing words. But before I read them, I want to ask you: What do you expect to hear in the closing words? I expect to hear about final judgment. I expect to hear victory party celebrations. I expect to hear a big put-down of God’s worthless and weak enemies.

*10Therefore, you kings, be wise; be warned, you rulers of the earth.  
 11Serve the Lord with fear and rejoice with trembling.   
 12Kiss the Son, lest he be angry and you be destroyed in your way,   
 for his wrath can flare up in a moment.   
 Blessed are all who take refuge in him.*

What I hear is God’s mercy! ***“Therefore, you kings, be wise… Serve the Lord with fear…”*** Even to those who hate God, God wants in heaven. Even though who plot against and persecute his church on earth, God still says that the way of salvation is open.

God does not rush to judgment. He gives warnings; second, third and fourth chances. What we hear even in this strident psalm is a message of God’s forgiveness and grace and undeserved love through his Son.

True enough, God’s invitation is stern. But that is because God is dealing here not with the bruised, battered and dejected hearts of people who feel their sinfulness. Here he is dealing with proud, arrogant opponents. But even in these stern words we hear a final appeal that they too repent and be saved.

So God says, ***“Kiss the Son.”*** Not the sort of kiss that politicians give to get a vote. Not even the sort of kiss a mother gives her little 7 pound 4 ounce newborn. ***“Kiss the Son”*** not because he is cute, but because he, even in a feed trough and ill-fitting baby clothes, he is God’s chosen one. He who came once to bear our sin on the cross, will come again to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him, and judgment to those who reject him. ***“Blessed are all who take refuge in him.”*** Amen.

1. *https://www.history.com/news/election-101-how-did-the-tradition-of-kissing-babies-begin* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Brug, *A Commentary on Psalms 1-72*, p.129. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)