

**Sunday, December 23, 2018 - Fourth Sunday of Advent**  
**“The King’s Royal Roots: Back to the Future”**

Micah 5: 2-5a

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Dynamic Reversal Structure

Adapted from CSL “The King is Coming”

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

There’s something about going back to your roots that can reestablish your sense of identity. Sometimes we lose our way and it can happen so slowly we don’t even realize it’s happening. It’s like getting lost on a hike, suddenly we realize that we don’t recognize where we are and where we’re going. So what do we do? Retrace our steps, get back to familiar landmarks and we find our way home.

We get lost in life, too. We have plans, we build strategies for achieving those plans. We have values and priorities. We have a sense of who we are, who we want to be, what we want to do - and then life happens. Sometimes we stay on track, following our life’s map so to speak. Often we get off track because life happens and things pull us this way and that. And we find ourselves pretty far off course.

This can happen in our spiritual lives as well. We are baptized into the death and resurrection of Jesus, many of us as infants but all of us totally dependent on God’s grace, His action in Christ, claiming us for His family. And then we start to think God needs our help - we value our spiritual life on what we’ve done rather than what God did for us. We take our Confirmation vows to be faithful, even to the point of death - but then comes high school, and college, and well, life happens. We can find ourselves a long way from God, His Word, His will, His way.

This can even happen to the “Big C” church corporate. Honestly, that’s what happened at Luther’s time - the Reformation was a course correction for a church that over time drifted away from basic truths that became great themes of the Reformation - grace alone, faith alone, Scripture alone, Christ alone.

It even can happen to a denomination. Sometimes it can seem like we major in minors, or emphasize truth and doctrine for its own sake and not for the sake of God’s mission

for His church. Or, we can chase any which way the wind blows to do mission but lose our theological mooring. And then we focus so much on who we are, and fighting over who we are that we forget what we are to be - and to be about - God's mission for us through Jesus Christ.

It even can happen to a congregation. A congregation can drift from God's mission for them and the central message as the body of Christ in its place and for all those around it.

And so, just like your map app when you go off course, what does it say? Recalibrating: we have to recalibrate our personal lives, our life as a congregation, as a denomination and as the whole kingdom of God on earth. This is what happened in the prophet Micah's time. Sunday after Sunday in this Advent journey the people of God lost their way. The kings of David's lineage acted like they were the real kings, not servants of God for the kingdom of God. The people were more interested in themselves, their own successes and not in serving God and loving their neighbor.

The prophets had some hard words, as is often true when preachers are doing what they're supposed to do - telling people things God has for them to say that their sinful nature doesn't want to hear. Of the great citadel Jerusalem and its temple Micah said, "Zion will be plowed as a field; Jerusalem shall become a heap of ruins."

But the message wasn't hopeless either. There's talk of a new king, another son of David, but also an inkling that this new king wouldn't be *just* another son of David like Rehoboam or Uzziah, Manasseh or even the last great king Josiah, as if maybe just one more good generation was needed to get it all back on track. No this wasn't just about going forward, this was a message of going back, remembering where they came from and getting back on course.

For the king this meant remembering David and his humble beginnings, back in his hometown of Bethlehem. This wasn't "David's royal city" then. It was a small rural town and David's father Jesse and his sons were shepherds. Remember that Samuel looked for a son to anoint as king and they brought past him all the older sons, starting with the tallest and

strongest and right on down the line those Russian dolls until the afterthought, juvenile, diminutive David out working in the fields. He wasn't even under consideration but he was the one.

Of course when he became king and grew in stature, in frame, in warrior prowess and the praise of the people David also outgrew his humility. Lured by babes and bucks David, and his house to follow went off-course. And God would have to find them, having lost their way to get them back. Back to the beginning - back to Bethlehem.

We started this Advent journey together understanding God's king and his kingdom by talking about "home" the place, the city that is the king's capital and that identifies his kingdom. We talked about the importance of a place to call home, with its safety and security. But we also saw that even the king of the kingdom of God could confuse his ideas about the kingdom with what God really wanted and intended it to be.

And so would be born one who would be ruler in Israel (interesting that Micah doesn't call him "king.") His origin and his journeys to follow were part of God's everlasting plan to send a savior and save the world, save the church, save you and me from our irresistible tendency and temptation to get ourselves off course, to wander from God's plan and then even to wonder if we're still His people.

Now on this last Sunday of Advent, a couple days from Christmas itself God calls us to consider not just our home as we did when we started this journey but also our roots - not where we live, or lived but where we were born - where we started, where our family comes from. You probably think immediately of your family home but in our spiritual lives let me remind you to consider where and when we were born into the family of God. For some of you it was right here at this very baptismal font, or over at Decatur and Charleston, the original Mountain View site. For others like myself, other churches in other places but again, in the waters of Holy Baptism the power of God for salvation is the same wherever and whenever it comes.

As we prepare for Christmas we remember how God himself went back to the beginning, back to basics, back to Bethlehem, the birthplace of the kingdom of God on earth. This time the son of David got it right. No losing His way. No selfish self-interests. This son of man came not to be served but to serve and to give His life as a ransom. Yet, He was a king, a true and greater king than any ruler of Israel or great President in our nation's history. An angel choir announced His birth - not to the people of power in high places but to lowly shepherds, out in the fields, doing their jobs like David was doing back in the day, just outside that little town of Bethlehem.

This was God's true king: David's son but also David's Lord. He would come to His capital city in a royal procession and be crowned with a crown of thorns. He would take upon Himself the sin and suffering for all, securing God's forgiveness for our own sin and self-interest, and be raised again, ascended to His Heavenly throne where he lives and rules forever. Peace, not just for the house of Israel but to the ends of the earth.

So in this, the last service of our Advent season we drawn closer to the manger itself and our preparation carries us back to the beginning, back to the font, back to the baptismal waters where it all started for you and me, where we received our own new life. God bless you today in Jesus' name, Amen.