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## *Comparative Kingdoms 101*

**A sermon by the Rev. Dr. Thee Smith**  
**Last Pentecost – Year B**

May the words of my mouth, and the meditations of our hearts, be always acceptable in your sight, O Lord my strength and our redeemer. Amen. —Psalm 19:14, paraphrase

Today's sermon could be called "Comparative Kingdoms 101." That's because I'm a college professor and I teach in a religion department, as some of you know. But also today is Christ the King Sunday, and a King must have a kingdom, right? Anyway, the kingship of Christ is always observed on the last Sunday of Pentecost season and just before Advent—the end of the year in our Christian church calendar. So the church year climaxes with Christ the King Sunday, and that's why we have the particular epistle and gospel readings appointed for today. That epistle from the very first chapter of Revelation where we are called a "kingdom of priests" serving a God who is therefore our King (Revelation 1:6). And there's our gospel from John where Jesus declares that his kingdom is 'not from this world' and Pilate retorts, "So you are a king?" (John 18:36-47).

Then to focus the day we have that classic opening prayer, our collect for today, where Jesus is acknowledged to be the "King of kings and Lord of lords"—that title quoted from the Book of Revelation (Revelation 17:14, 19:16; cf. 1 Timothy 6:15). And to cap it all we have a Psalm and hymns and anthems—even a composer whose last name just happens also to be "King"—all of this combining to praise our King Jesus! It'll be a wonder if we don't walk out of this building with that verse from Handel's Messiah ringing in our ears: "♪ King of kings, and Lord of lords—♪ And He shall reign forever and ever! ♪"

But finally it's because I teach comparative religions courses that I'm enamored of that sermon title, "Comparative Kingdoms 101." In my comparative religion classes the students get to think about how we can end rivalry and competition between religions. In place of rivalry my lectures focus on how religions can be mutually complementary instead of mutually competing with one another or—worse yet—mutually excluding one another, as we see too often in the world today.

So here's one of my favorite examples of such a complementary connection between another faith tradition and our Christian faith tradition. It's from Buddhism, specifically Mahayana Buddhism I understand. And just like today's gospel story where Jesus tells Pilate, "my kingdom is not from here" (John 18:36), it's a story about a kingdom that is also spiritual or 'not from this world:' the kingdom of Shambhala or Sham-ba-lá.

The story is recounted by one of our most noted spiritual teachers today, Joanna Macy. She tells this ancient Tibetan prophesy of the coming of the Kingdom of Shambhala.

There comes a time when all life on earth is in danger. Barbarian powers have arisen. Although they waste their wealth in preparation to annihilate each other, they have much in common: weapons of unfathomable devastation and technologies that lay waste the world.

It is now, when the future of all beings hangs by the frailest of threads, that the kingdom of Shambhala emerges. "You cannot go there, for it is not a place. It exists in the hearts and minds of the Shambhala warriors. But you cannot recognize a Shambhala warrior by sight, for there is no uniform or insignia, there are no banners. And there are no barricades from

which to threaten the enemy, for the Shambhala warriors have no land of their own. Always they move on the terrain of the barbarians themselves. Now comes the time when great courage is required of the Shambhala warriors, moral and physical courage. For they must go into the very heart of the barbarian power and dismantle the weapons. To remove these weapons, in every sense of the word, they must go into the corridors of power where the decisions are made.

"The Shambhala warriors know they can do this because the weapons are *mano-maya*, mind-made. This is very important to remember ... The weapons are made by the human mind! So they can be unmade by the human mind! The Shambhala warriors know that the dangers that threaten life on Earth do not come from evil deities or extraterrestrial powers. They arise from our own choices and relationships. So, now, the Shambhala warrior must go into training.

"How do they train?" ... "They train in the use of two weapons ... "The weapons are compassion and insight. Both are necessary. We need this first one ... because it provides us the fuel, it moves us out to act on behalf of other beings. But by itself it can burn us out. So we need the second as well, which is insight into the [interdependent connection] of all things. Insight lets us see that the battle is not between good people and bad people, for the line between good and evil runs through every human heart. We realize that we are interconnected, as in a web, and that each act with pure motivation affects the entire web, bringing consequences we cannot measure or even see. "But insight alone ... "can seem too cool to keep us going. So we need as well the heat of compassion, our openness to the world's pain. Both weapons or tools are necessary to the Shambhala warrior." – Joanna Macy <http://www.awakin.org/read/view.php?tid=236>

Wow! What a story, yes? Again, it's a Buddhist story. And yet it complements our Christian story. In particular it complements today's Gospel story where we see King Jesus declare certain things about his kingdom. First he says, as already noted, that his kingdom is not "of this world." Yet like Shambhala in the Buddhist story it is an emerging kingdom—emerging in the world today just as the barbarian incursions are also increasing among us. And then Jesus says something that connects with the warriors in the Shambhala story: "If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over" (John 18:36) Now doesn't that remind us of Joanna Macy's emphasis that "the battle is not between good people and bad people, for the line between good and evil runs through every human heart."

But at the end of the day we must acknowledge that the Buddhist story is a story about a kingdom with no apparent king! That's right! It's a great story but it's missing the key element for us Christians on this Christ the King Sunday: it's missing the "King of kings and Lord of lords."

Certainly there's so much more that we could and should say here. And as your designated college professor you know I could. But let's begin drawing to a close. Consider here this emphasis from Jesus as he stood before the judgment seat of Pontius Pilate that day. Recall his final words when Pilate challenged him, "So you are a king?"

Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice."

Like the Shambhala warriors, my Christian friends—but even more as Christ's "kingdom of priests" as Revelation calls us to be, let us count ourselves among those who listen to that voice of Jesus. And thus let us become warriors of *that* kingdom: that emerging kingdom of our "King of kings and Lord of lords," who can do far more than all the rulers of this world; so much more, the letter to the Ephesians testifies, the he can "accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine" (Ephesians 3:30).

In that connection I leave you with this happy verse from that old African American spiritual, "Ride on King Jesus!"

♪ He is King of kings  
♪ He is Lord of lords.  
♪ No man works like him. ♪

Amen!

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**Appendix**

## “Ride on King Jesus:”



African American Slave Spiritual & Images

Source: Danny Ledonne Blogspot on “Jesus Christ and Slavery”

Posted 1/16/2012 and accessed here 11/22/2015

<http://dannyledonne.blogspot.com/2012/01/jesus-christ-and-slavery.html?showComment=1448184850848#c2515777716193582609>

### Selected Internet Sites

- [More African American Slave Spiritual Ride On King Jesus images](#)
- [RIDE ON KING JESUS - Negro Spirituals](#)
  - [www.negrospirituall.com/songs/ride\\_on\\_king\\_jesus.htm](http://www.negrospirituall.com/songs/ride_on_king_jesus.htm)
  - Ride on King Jesus! ... Ride on King Jesus, ride on No ... by Spiritual Workshop
- [African- American Spiritual - Ride on, King Jesus... www.youtube.com/watch?v= dVAHZTp9X8](#)
  - Jul 14, 2012 · African-American Spiritual - Ride on, King Jesus - Arrangement: Johnson Kathy Price ... African-American Spiritual - Ride on, King Jesus - Arrangement: ...
- [African American Slave Spiritual Ride On King Jesus - Video Results](#)