

I want you to think back this morning to the first time we met. What kind of a first impression did I make?

The first time I met many of your fine people was just over a year and a half ago for my installation. I sometimes wonder what kind of first impression my family and I gave to those of you who were there.

From my perspective, it couldn't have been all that impressive. The fact is, when I first met many of you I was barely keeping my head above water – if I'm honest, I wasn't keeping my head above water. I had just moved my family half way across the country. If moving weren't stressful enough, the day after our stuff arrived our little boy Ezra had his mystery illness and 19 day stay at Children's Hospital.

And it was right in the middle of that – stressed about our son, just moved half way across the country (house filled with unpacked boxes, living out of suitcases), oh yeah, and did I mention Laura was pregnant too – it was right in the middle of that when I met most of you for the first time... at the end of my rope, not the best of circumstances for making a good first impression.

Thankfully, you welcomed my family and I with open arms, you cared for and loved us when we weren't in a place to care and love you back.

Still, not the best circumstance to make a good first impression...

Our society places a good deal of importance on first impressions. For whatever reason, many people today have decided all it takes is one quick, first interaction to form an opinion about a person based on their appearance, body language, demeanor, mannerisms, you name it.

You don't get a second chance to make a first impression we are told. And so, you can go online and find all sorts of advice on how to make a good first impression, emphasizing the importance of those first moments, and reminding you how hard it can be to change someone's first impression.

Hopefully, all of you understand the flaw in placing too much emphasis on first impressions. To think that my first moments with a person can accurately tell me what I need to know about that person is illogical, uncharitable, and unchristian. It's just a fact that appearances and first impressions can be, and often are, deceiving.

We have a big example of that today: What kind of first impression do you think Jesus gave?

Sometimes it apparently was pretty good: think of the young Jesus in the temple impressing all the elders and teachers of the law with his probing questions and insights.

Sometimes, however, it seems that Jesus didn't make all that good of a first impression. The Bible tells us that **“he had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.”**

Jesus, in a lot of ways, looked like an ordinary guy – and a poor one at that. He was born in a stable, raised by a blue-collar worker in a little country town.

Certainly, the first impression the Roman soldiers had of him wasn't all that good. The atmosphere in Jerusalem at the time of Matthew 27 was not tense – especially for those foreign, occupying soldiers from Rome. The Romans had squashed a few violent protests in the years leading up to Matthew 27. It was a known fact in the Roman Empire that service in Israel may mean having to squash an uprising or two because those Jews had this persistent notion that as God's chosen people they should be free.

Add to the general freedom-loving attitude of the Jews the fact that it was the Passover, which meant that Jerusalem's population had ballooned as visitors streamed in from the countryside for this religious celebration. So you have an occupied city of freedom-loving Jews whose population had easily doubled for a festival when they remembered the “good old days” when their God gave them freedom from that oppressive foreign nation, Egypt. You have a politically charged atmosphere with some understandably nervous Roman soldiers.

And then this Jesus is dragged in front of them, by a mob of angry Jews. They are told this this Jesus claims to be a king.

What do you think their first impression of Jesus was?

They'd seen kings before. Their king was Caesar. First impression: this guy was no king. His own followers had abandoned him. His own people had turned him in. He looked like any other poor country boy – he had no crown, no jewels, no royal robe or entourage.

To them, Jesus appeared to be nothing more than another poor, Jewish, trouble-maker – dangerous maybe, but certainly not a king.

But first impressions and appearances can be deceiving.

They would beat this “king.” They would dress this “king” up in robes and press a crown of thorns on his head. They would blindfold, spit in the face of, and mock this “king.” They would hang this “king” on a Roman cross.

But first impressions were deceiving. We know it. Some of them learned it too – the earthquake and darkness in the middle of the day that accompanied Jesus' death were enough to convince at least one of these Roman soldiers that there was more to this man than what first appearances revealed...

Of those who saw Jesus when he walked this earth, many doubted his claims about himself. He just didn't make all that impressive of an impression. He just didn't do what one would expect if he was who he said he was.

He claimed to be the Messiah, the one that was supposed to come and save God's people. But look at him. If this is the Messiah, why wasn't he getting rid of the Romans instead of being killed by the Romans?

He claimed to be king. If this was a king, where are all the pomp and splendor that go with kingship?

He claimed to be God's own Son. If this was God's own Son, one would think there would be some kind of other-worldly glow, or halo, or something that made clear that he was someone more than the son of a blue collar laborer in Nazareth.

Many people looked at Jesus, saw that he wasn't what they *wanted* in a king, he wasn't what they *wanted* in a Messiah or Savior, and so they just disregarded him, they doubted him, they mocked him, they killed him.

You and I would never do that with Jesus, would we?

Friends, on Christ the King Sunday, we remember that the Bible clearly tells us that Jesus is King of kings and Lord of lords; that the second Jesus rose from the dead, the second he ascended into heaven, he assumed complete control and rule over the entire universe – the whole world has become his footstool, God the Father says.

We don't ever look at the circumstances around us and doubt that governance do we?

The truth is, every single time you get worried, that is exactly what you do.

You look at some problem that looks daunting to solve – some financial pickle you can't fix, some uneasiness and rumors in the workplace, some relationship that is nothing but a stress to you, some illness that isn't going away, fill in the blank! When it comes to the things that worry us, well, you could go on all day. You look at that thing, and first appearances paint it as daunting and insurmountable.

But friends, what are you afraid of? If Jesus is indeed King of kings and Lord of lords, if he is, as he promises, ruling all things for the good of his people, what is there to be afraid of? What is there to be worried about?

We may not be beating Jesus, dressing him up in a robe, pressing a crown of thorns on his head, blindfolding him, spitting on him, mockingly shouting, "Hail, King of the Jews" like those Roman soldiers, but every time we worry about anything we are just as guilty of doubting Jesus' kingship as them. Appearances deceive us because Jesus isn't ruling how we would rule if we were in his shoes and that makes us worry.

I know that sounds like a harsh comparison for a seemingly innocuous and certainly widespread thing like worry, but it is true, isn't it?

Jesus says, "I am king. I've got this."

Every time we worry we say right back, "Jesus, are you sure you know how to be a king?"

It should go without saying, friends, this should not be. Things in your life may seem, at times, like they are spiraling out of control, but that does not mean they have spiraled out of Jesus' control – appearances can be, and often are, deceiving. Jesus may not be ruling this world the way we *want* him to be ruling, but that does not mean he does not know and give what is best for us – appearances can be, and often are, deceiving.

Friends remember that the Jesus who didn't look all that impressive to the Jews and Roman soldiers actually was doing something incomparably impressive.

Jesus could have made crystal clear to the Romans and the Jews that he was King of kings and Lord of lords. He could have stopped those Roman blows in an instant (like the time the angry mob in Nazareth was unable to lay a hand on him as he walked right through them). He could have revealed his full glory and looked more like a king (like he did on the Mount of Transfiguration). He could have freed the Jews from Roman control, and set up a nation where people never got hungry (like by the Sea of Galilee where he fed the 5000) and with a look, touch, or word every disease was cured (like that woman who had been bleeding for seven years and just touched the corner of his robe and was healed).

Jesus could have done all of that and so much more, and it all would have been very impressive from a human standpoint. It would have given a much better first impression. It would have made a lot more of his countrymen happy because he would be the kind of king they *wanted* him to be. It would have forced people to respect him because he would be behaving the way humans expect kings to behave.

He would have been the king they *wanted* him to be, but he wouldn't have been the kind of king they *needed* him to be.

You see the Roman soldiers and Jews needed something more than a king who could pull off impressive miracles, fill their bellies, and heal their diseases. They needed a king who would go deeper than the superficial and fix a bigger problem – one they maybe didn't even know they had. They needed a king who could say, "**Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing,**" and then actually do what it took so that the Father could forgive them.

Friends, Jesus could rule your life so that whenever something threatened to worry you, it would just go away (like when he made death go away from Mary, Martha, and Lazarus). He could fill your bank account (like the time he had the disciples catch a fish and pull money from its mouth). He could stop people from being mean to you (like that time he busted Paul out of prison in Philippi).

Jesus could do all of that and so much more, and it all would be incredibly impressive from a human standpoint. It would give a better first impression. It would make you (at least superficially) a lot happier because he would be the king you *want* him to be.

But he wouldn't be the kind of king you *need* him to be.

It turns out that the greatest, most impressive, most powerful, most awe-inspiring act of God was when he didn't do anything at all. The most impressive act of God was the one that didn't look all that impressive from the outside. It was an act prophesied by Isaiah:

“Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth...”

Jesus didn't look all that impressive standing there with a purple robe over his shredded back, streams of blood flowing from his thorn-pierced brow, staggering from blow after blow by the jeering crowd. He doesn't look all that powerful and in control as the nails are driven into his hands and feet, as the weight of cross and man thudded into that hole in the ground and the “king of the Jews” was crucified and died. But here, right here, we see the single greatest thing God has ever done. He's paying for our sins – all of them.

Not always the king you *want* him to be... but exactly the king you *need* him to be... That's our Jesus. That's Christ the King.

And the same Jesus who was willing to keep his mouth shut in the face of his accusers, to do nothing as they beat him, mocked him, killed him; the same Jesus who did all that to forgive you, he rose from the dead and has assumed his rightful place at the Father's right hand, King of kings, and Lord of lords. He who said and did nothing as he hung on the cross for you now is ruling everything for you, to bring you safely home to the heaven he has earned for you.

Remember friends, in Jesus' world first impressions can be, and often are deceiving. Jesus may not always be the King you want, but he is the King you need.

That is your Jesus. That is your king. Hail Christ the King!

Amen.