

A Great and Glorious Queen
2 Chronicles 9:1-9, 12
October 16, 2022 – Center Harbor Congregational Church, UCC
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Once upon a time, there was a great and glorious queen. She lived with her family in the Queendom by the Sea. There was the Queen Regnant herself, in all her splendor, the King Consort by her side, the brave and brilliant Crown Prince, the Prince Charming, who was actually quite charming, and the Princess Royale, who was so lovely and so gracious that she made everyone in the queendom smile.

The royal family lived in a great round castle made of stone. It sat on a cliff, guarding the queendom from invaders from the sea. When there were storms, the waves would crash against the base of the cliff, but the castle stood strong and tall and kept the royal family safe. From the castle's towers, the two Princes and the Princess Royale could see for miles around. They loved to look out over the land ruled by their mother the Queen, and imagine the adventures she would take them on. They practiced fighting with their swords, so that they would be ready when a great adventure came. The Princes, who were older, got to go on adventures first, and the Princess Royale could hardly wait for her turn to ride out to an adventure, too.

Now, the queendom was safe from attack by sea or by land, but alas! There was a dragon who lived in a cave in the heart of the queendom itself. This was not a tame or friendly dragon, but one that threatened all the villagers in the land. So one day, the Queen said to the Princess Royale, "It is time for you to come on one of my adventures. We can't let the Princes have all the fun, just because they are older than you." The Princess Royale was so excited! So, the Queen and the Princess Royale mounted on the finest horses in the land, and they rode out from the castle by the sea, to find the dragon and slay it, to save all the people of the land.

How do you think they found the dragon? How did they kill it? Were they in danger? Were they brave? Try to imagine the end of this story, and we will see tomorrow night whether you were right.

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The Queendom by the Sea. These are the bedtime stories that I told my daughter Anna when she was a preschooler. She loved them! The dragon was always a metaphorical version of one of her own fears. The Queen and the Princess Royale were always able to find the dragon. Sometimes they sang songs to it, to charm it into behaving. Sometimes they killed the dragon outright, so that it would not scare Anna any more. Once, when I had to go on a business trip to Florida, I told Anna the story of the great and glorious Queen going on an adventure alone, far, far away to the land of the Giant Rodent. The Princess Royale could not come along on this adventure, but the Queen promised to return with a talisman from that land, proof that the Queen had conquered it. When I came back from my trip, I brought her Mickey Mouse ears, from the land of the Giant Rodent. Anna was in middle school before she realized that the stories were about her and about our own family.

We all love stories of queens and kings, don't we? Disney princesses are enough to make any little girl swoon, and even grown-ups in a land that has no queen at all will get up very early to watch a royal wedding on television. Whether present-day or once-upon-a-time, we are entranced by the splendor, the pageantry, the ostentatious display of wealth accumulated over generations. We imagine that it is ours. Deep down, we are all like little Anna, seeing ourselves as the Princess Royale or the Crown Prince in the story. We don't even consider the near certainty that if we lived in the time of that fairy tale, we would almost certainly be the maid servant or the landless serf, whose labor – day in and day out – was

conscripted to support the kings and queens in their displays of wealth. Great castles are not built by the royals who live in them. They are built by those who, voluntarily or not, give their bodies and their lives in the service of the queen. Whole economies revolve around maintaining the royal household in splendor, and the queen, if she is smart, will invite the people to believe that her own greatness and glory reflect positively on the people, themselves.

King Solomon re-organized the whole economy of the nation of Israel to construct the Great Temple in Jerusalem. He conscripted workers from all twelve tribes, meaning that they could not tend to their own farms for all the years that the Temple was being built. People suffered. There was unrest. Still, Solomon was lauded for generations for this great accomplishment – the Temple in which, it was said, the Spirit of the Lord dwelled. But it wasn't just the Temple. Solomon's court was an amazing display of wealth, gathered from around the known world, and he was admired for it, near and far

And then, in today's scripture, we read of the Queen of Sheba paying a visit to King Solomon. She is a queen in her own right, a Queen Regnant. We don't see many of those in the Bible. And she has ostentatious wealth of her own. She comes all the way from Sheba (which is probably Ethiopia) to Jerusalem, to show off her own wealth to Solomon, and to check out what she has heard about him – his wealth and his wisdom. The Bible says that he solves all her riddles, and the displays of his wealth take her breath away.

You know, the Hebrew Scriptures invite us to think of God as a great and glorious king, who has all the powers of an earthly ruler and rules over them all. We used this language in our call to worship, from Psalm 47, and many of our traditional hymns sing of God as king. I don't usually choose those hymns for our worship, because of the insistently male language for God. But this morning we sang Come Thou, Almighty King. There is also O Worship the King, Crown Him with Many Crowns, and even many of the Christmas carols: Hark! The Herald Angels Sing, Glory to the Newborn King. We have all breathed in this image of God as a powerful, almost earthly king with crowns and all the other trappings that go with earthly royalty.

But the Bible tells us in so many places that God condemns earthly rulers unless they use their power to protect the poor and powerless and to bring justice to those who cannot get justice on their own. The whole Book of Amos is about this. And the Gospel of Luke. God is on the side of those whose labor is conscripted to build great palaces and temples, the Bible tells us. God is on the side of those who are hungry. God is on the side of sick and the powerless. And God invites us to use the power that WE have, too, to lift up those who cannot lift up themselves.

So, when I read this story of the Queen of Sheba, first I think, "Well, thank goodness we finally get the story of a powerful woman, a great and glorious queen, with power and wealth in her own name. It is not only kings who get to have wealth and power this time. Hallelujah!" And then I remember that I owe my allegiance not to any earthly power at all, not to kings nor to queens, but to the Holy One, the Queen of Heaven, who lives and reigns over all the earth, and whose heart is open to those who labor, to those who hunger, to those who grieve, to those who are exploited. When I see earthly power and wealth, I pray that the Great and Glorious Queen of Heaven will help me keep my own values straight and my heart in the right place.

Amen