

Rules for Rulers
[Luke 4:1-13](#)
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There's an old saying that Parenting doesn't come with an instruction manual, and it's very true. I mean, there are lots of books about Parenting – lots of very helpful guides about what to expect when you're expecting, books on feeding and potty training and expected developmental benchmarks, but they all only give a very, very general guide to what might possibly happen, and when it comes right down to it, they're not much use in a specific crisis. Chances are, each individual child will diverge from the norm in its own particularly charming ways, and no book can predict that ahead of time, so you're just kind of along for the ride. But this is true of more than just parenting. Life doesn't come with an instruction manual. It would've been incredibly helpful, when I turned nineteen, to just get a book describing all the things that adults are supposed to do in order to qualify as a functional adult – how to sew a button on a shirt, how to make small talk with strangers at an uncomfortable social engagement, how to file taxes. It's all very important, and instead of just muddling through and trying to figure out for yourself, it would've been really nice just to get a set of rules that tell you exactly what to do in every situation, clear as a bell, impossible to mess up.

In our gospel reading this morning, we see Jesus at the very, very beginning of his story, the beginning of his ministry on earth. Just before our reading, Jesus went to the Jordan River to be baptized by John the Baptist, and while he is down in the water, something unthinkable happens. As Jesus is being baptized, the heavens rip open, and the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove swoops through this giant tear in the fabric of reality and lands on Jesus, and a voice comes through the rift, shouting for all the crowds around him to hear, You are my dearly beloved Son, and you bring me great joy! And if that happens to you, you can't just go back to carpentry. You can't just file that away in the back of your mind and carry on with your ordinary life. Jesus is clearly someone special, someone unique, he is the beloved, chosen Son of God, he is the Messiah, and that means he is King.

But Jesus doesn't know how to be King. He's a carpenter. He's from Nazareth, a little nowhere town in the backwater of the backwater of the crummiest little corner of the Roman Empire. He's spent his entire life with peasants and farmers and tradesmen and slaves. He's never met a King. He's got no frame of reference, no instruction manual, no way to even know how to begin processing this amazing thing that's happened to him. I mean, if tomorrow someone knocked at your door and told you that you are now officially the King of Switzerland, congratulations! And then they left, what would you do? Where would you even start? Do you apply for a swiss passport? Show up at the Swiss Embassy asking if there's a crown waiting

for you somewhere? Just hide at home in your pajamas eating chocolate? This is a major life changing moment here, and if Jesus is the Messiah, if Jesus is the King, he's going to have to understand exactly what that means.

So, led by the Holy Spirit, Jesus heads out into the wilderness to spend some time thinking and praying and planning out exactly what he should do next, exactly what it means for him to be King. And as luck would have it, there in the wilderness he meets someone who is kind of an expert at Kings. It's the devil, and if anyone in the universe knows what Kings are really like, it's the devil. He spends a lot of time with them. He's seen them at work, firsthand, and so if Jesus needs some instruction, some training, well, the devil is more than happy to offer him a crash course in what it means to be the King, Here are the Rules for Rulers, Kingship 101, class is now in session.

And the first lesson the devil teaches is that Kings never get hungry. "If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to turn into a big, beautiful loaf of bread." If you want food, order someone to make food for you. Order something to become food for you. Whatever you want, whatever you need, when you're King, those desires can be satisfied in an instant, with a single word. You never need to be hungry, you never need to be thirsty or lonely or frightened, you never need to suffer, not for one second. You're a King, and Kings don't get hungry.

Then the Devil moves on to his Lesson number 2: Kings make deals. "I will give you all the kingdoms of the world, they're all for you, if you'll just

bow down and worship me. Quid Pro Quo.” See, while a King is in charge of their own territory, there are always other kings out there too, and so you have to learn to play a little politics. You have to give a little to get a little, you scratch my back so that I, on some future date to be determined, can scratch yours. So, the devil tells Jesus that if he'll compromise on his principles just a little bit, and promise to be his right hand man going forward, he'll reward him with all these lovely prizes, make him king over all these other nations – even Switzerland – and all he has to do is follow the devil's lead from now on. That's politics. Don't worry about your principles. Kings don't need principles, they have power instead.

And then the last lesson. The Devil takes Jesus up to the top of the Temple in Jerusalem, the highest point on the highest building on the highest mountain in Israel, and the Devil tells him to jump, because Lesson #3, Kings don't get hurt. “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, and you'll be fine.” Because Kings don't get hurt; Kings can't get hurt. Kings have other people that do their suffering for them, they have employees, vassals, minions and peons who can feel their pain for them. If a King jumps off a building, his subjects will pile themselves on the ground to break his fall, they'll catch him in mid-air and bring him down for a perfect landing, every time. Kings can't suffer. Kings can't get hurt.

These are the three lessons the Devil tries to teach Jesus in how to be a King: Kings don't get hungry, Kings compromise, and Kings don't get hurt. But even though the Devil is so kind and so considerate to lend Jesus his

considerable expertise in what it takes to be a King, Jesus doesn't prove to be a very attentive student. After every lesson, Jesus speaks up, Jesus talks back, Jesus contradicts each and every lesson that the Devil tries to teach him. When the Devil says that Kings never get hungry, Jesus says he doesn't care about his hunger, he cares about God supplying his spiritual needs first. When the Devil says that Kings have to play politics, Jesus refuses to sacrifice his integrity, he refuses to bow down to anyone but God and God alone. When the Devil says that Kings never get hurt, Jesus says he will not test God's love for him by recklessly putting himself in harm's way. And every time, Jesus points to scripture to refute the case the devil is making for what a King should be like. All the way through their conversation, at every step, at every turn, Jesus refuses to accept the Devil's rules for rulers, Jesus refuses to believe that the Devil truly knows how the Messiah, the King of Kings, ought to behave. And for the rest of his life, in everything that Jesus says and does, he does the complete opposite of what the Devil wants him to do. The Devil says that Kings never get hungry, and yet Jesus the King feeds the hungry around him, feeds the crowds with endless bread and fish, and feeds his disciples with living bread, with his own body and blood in the bread and the cup of the Lord's Table, because a true King cares for his people ahead of himself. The Devil says that Kings need to compromise, and yet Jesus the King puts the will of his Father first in every single circumstance, he refuses to co-operate with the powers that try and pull him away from doing God's will, because a true King will follow God no

matter what the cost. The Devil says that Kings never get hurt, and yet Jesus the King willingly suffers, willingly gives up his life, he endures torture and misery and even death, all for the sake of rebellious sinners like you and me, because a true King lays down his life for the people he loves. At every moment, all throughout his life, from his baptism to the cross to the empty tomb and forevermore, Jesus Christ is the Messiah, the King of Kings, but he's not a King like any other King the world has ever known, because he's not a King who follows the devil's rules, he's not a King who lives only for himself, who uses his position to get more comfort and power and security for himself alone. Jesus Christ is a King who overturns every idea we've got about what a King is supposed to be like, he's a King who gives, a King who serves, a King who suffers, a King who saves.

That's the King we have been called to follow. Jesus Christ is our King, and that means we are citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven, heirs of his promise and members of his family. And yet each and every day, it is so tempting to follow the devil's rules for how we should use the power we have been given, the power we have over ourselves and over the world and the people around us. The devil keeps telling us that if you want something, take it; if you can do something, do it; if you don't like something, fix it; if you have the power, use it, force things to follow your plans, force people to conform to your standards, force the world to order itself for your benefit. Those are the rules that the Devil wants Jesus to follow, and they're the same rules that humans have followed over and over again all throughout

our history, and every time they have brought us disaster. We keep thinking that if everyone would just listen to and obey and follow whatever human system of wisdom we come up with, that suddenly the universe will be at peace. The Episcopal priest Robert Capon wrote that “The human race adheres devoutly to the belief that one more application of power will bring in the kingdom. One more invasion, one more war, one more escalation, one more jealous fit, one more towering rage – in short, one more twist of whatever arm you have got hold of will make goodness triumph and peace reign. But it never works.” When we follow the devil’s rules for what power looks like, what Kings look like, we only end up destroying ourselves, destroying our world, spreading misery and pain everywhere we go. And it doesn’t have to be that way. The voice of Jesus Christ, the voice of our King and Saviour, that voice still calls to us, today and everyday. Jesus Christ is alive, he is the King who gives himself for us, to feed us and strengthen us and save us from death, that King calls us to follow him, to live as he lived, to love as he has loved us. As Christ’s people, his body here in the world, we are meant to use our power in the same way Jesus did, to use whatever influence we have on the world around us, not to control, not to conquer, but to serve. We are called to set aside our desire for comfort and power and security and instead take hold of the love of Jesus Christ, to every day reject the wisdom of this world and instead seek to see the world the way Christ sees it. We have been given so much – we have been entrusted with the greatest treasure imaginable, the greatest power the world has ever

known, the love of God revealed in Jesus Christ, in his life, death and resurrection. And we are called to use that power to serve, to bless, to share, so that the world around will see through our words and actions what a King is truly meant to be, because they will see Jesus Christ in us. In everything we say and do, may Jesus Christ be King of Kings and Lord of Lords, today and forevermore. In the name of Jesus Christ – Amen!