



humans are both private and public beings.

god is both father and king

from first words...

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We can imagine any number of words that might have been Jesus' first. We can imagine any number of early conversations between Jesus and his parents, between Jesus and friends, between Jesus and relatives, between Jesus and acquaintances. But scripture does not report any such conversations.

As Jesus' first recorded words, Matthew records those that Jesus spoke to John the Baptist, confirming his desire to be baptized at the beginning of his public ministry—age thirty, or thereabouts.<sup>1</sup> Jesus' first words recorded by Mark are those that represent Jesus' own understanding of his message, his ministry, and his life: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel."<sup>2</sup> In John, Jesus' first recorded words again come at the beginning of his public ministry. They take the form of query, made to two of the Baptist's disciples who had been cautiously following and observing him, "What seek ye?"<sup>3</sup>

Luke pushes Jesus' first recorded words some two decades earlier than the other three Gospel writers. It was at the tender age of twelve, according to Luke, that Jesus' parents took him to

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 3.<sup>15</sup> This contextualized question represents, really, the question that Jesus poses to every individual who comes to Jesus, wondering who and what he is.

<sup>2</sup> Mark 1.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>3</sup> John 1.<sup>38</sup>

Jerusalem to attend Passover. With the end of Passover, Joseph and Mary headed home, Joseph assuming, presumably, that Jesus was with the women, as he would heretofore always have been, and Mary assuming that he was with the men, as he would henceforth be. When, after a full day's journey, they realized that Jesus was with neither of them, the worried parents returned to Jerusalem, where they engaged in a frantic search of their son. Finally, after three undoubtedly anxious days, they found Jesus in the temple carrying on a lively and intelligent theological discussion with priests, rabbis, and other temple notables.

But, Luke does not record any of Jesus' heady words that so impressed these astute scholars. Instead, the first words that Luke records are those with which Jesus answered his mother's confused query, "Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? Behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing."

"How is it," Jesus answered, "that ye sought me? Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?"<sup>4</sup>

...to last words

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We now jump forward in time. Jesus is nearing the end of his mortal ministry. His has been a notable life. In ministering, Jesus has served many needy people. He has delivered many a wise, inspired, healing, and saving word. While bringing hope to many a vulnerable individual, his actions and teachings have caused much consternation among the same religious leaders that he so impressed a couple of decades earlier in the temple.

Knowing the tragic end that his unparalleled life took, it is only natural that we would be interested in any final words that Jesus might have uttered. All total, the four Gospel writers record seven utterances that Jesus made from the cross, but each Gospel writer records his own final words of Jesus. As their final words, Matthew and Mark place the prayerful, sorrowful, and tragic complaint of the Old Testament's great Psalmist on Jesus' lips, "My

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<sup>4</sup> Luke 2.<sup>48-49</sup>

God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”<sup>5</sup> John places the fatalistic, “It is finished,” on Jesus lips as his last words. Luke finishes the words of Jesus as he began them: with a positive appeal to “Father.”

“Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.”<sup>6</sup>

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Private life with father—patēr, abba

Jesus’ entire life was dedicated to his *Father*, as he announced to his parents at age twelve in the temple. Jesus’ death, too, was dedicated to his *Father*, as he announced in his dying breaths from his cross at Calvary. Luke, then, makes explicit in his text what all four Gospels reveal: throughout his life, from start to finish, Jesus thought of and spoke to God as his *Father*.<sup>7</sup> In Jesus’ private life, God was personal and personable. God, *Father*, was a constant and intimate presence in his life.

“And he that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him.”<sup>8</sup>

Jesus might have simply and respectfully spoken of his *God*. He might have dedicated his life and death to his *God*. Jesus’ “God” might have communicated to others the ultimate grandeur and power of Deity. But in Jesus’ mind, it did not and could not reveal the full reality and intimacy of his relationship with Deity. For this, only *Father* would do. So, in Jesus’ discourse, *Father* was always the preferred name by which Jesus called God. In his own private life, God was always, in Jesus’ mind and heart, *Father*.

But Jesus went further. God did not restrict his accessibility and intimacy to his Only Begotten Son. While Jesus spoke repeatedly of “My Father,” when speaking to the multitudes

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<sup>5</sup> Matthew 27.<sup>46</sup> and Mark 15.<sup>34</sup> (Psalm 22.<sup>1</sup>)

<sup>6</sup> Luke 23.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>7</sup> The Gospel writers seem to translate Jesus’ normal Aramaic *Abba*, “Papa,” into the common Greek *Pater*, with its winsome “Pa” at the head.

<sup>8</sup> John 8.<sup>29</sup>

that pressed upon him and the individuals to whom he ministered, he spoke in such a way as to bear witness that God was also their Father. In instructing his disciples concerning the centrality of prayer, Jesus taught them to address God as “Our Father,” or “Our Papa,” “our Daddy.” This was far, far more than part of a formula for successful, acceptable, and communicative prayer. It was indicative of the real divine intimacy which Jesus lived and wished his disciples to experience and live right along with him.

Jesus knew and taught, of course, that Deity was all powerful and all knowing. He Knew that God was ultimate. But he knew equally well that Deity was also intimate: Father. While he may have first learned this in his searching readings of the sacred texts that he so loved to read, his personal experiences confirmed the sacred truth.

“Though the LORD be high,  
yet hath he respect unto the lowly...”<sup>9</sup>

Jesus promised those who heard him that in their private lives they could know God personally and intimately. They could “possess” Him and He them as a child possessed their Papa and their Papa possessed his child.

This is, to be sure, gospel: “good news”—some of, if not the very best news that one can conceive. It is, almost, too good to be true. It is little wonder, really, that so many find it difficult to believe.

### Public life in a king’s domain

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Based on America’s obsession, fetish even, with “rugged individualism,” and the nation’s right-wing’s emphasis on “privacy,” with its conclusion that because we are private beings we can do whatever thing we damn-well please,<sup>10</sup> one might be excused for concluding that human beings are always and only private individuals without public life or responsibilities.

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<sup>9</sup> Psalm 139.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>10</sup> There are few better metaphors for this deception and ignorance than the American right’s refusal to safeguard society through the simple and harmless act of wearing a mask during a world-wide pandemic.

Nothing, however, could be further from the truth.

Human beings also possess a public side. They are social beings. This is at the very heart of what “the atonement of Jesus Christ” means. His atonement is, first, a revelation of Deity’s connectedness to humanity. But it is, secondly, a revelation of the connectedness of humanity. Like it or not—and America’s right does not like it—we are all connected. It does not matter one bit whether we like it or not, we cannot think, we cannot speak, we cannot act, indeed, we cannot exist without impacting another. As the COVID-19 pandemic so perfectly illustrates, we either accept this connectedness, and live, or we deny it and die. Enduringness or annihilation—like it or not, these are our unavoidable choices. There is no middle ground and no escaping this reality.

In his teachings, Jesus never forgot this dual aspect of humanity: private and public. In their private lives, he invited all who heard him to consider and experience God as *Father*. But, what about their private lives? Who was God in their public lives?

The four Gospels record that Jesus spoke the specific words, “kingdom of God,” or “kingdom of heaven” some fifty times. These same Gospels, record hundreds of verses, thousands of words that have this kingdom as their principle topic. We recall that these are Jesus’ first words, as recorded by Mark: ““The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand.” Jesus’ most common—and some of his best known—parables have the “kingdom of God/heaven” as their metaphor for the relationship between humans and God, and between individual humans. Commensurate with this usage, then, God is “King” in addition to “Father.”

In our private lives and affairs, we are to think of and approach God as Father. But in our public lives and affairs, we are to think of and approach God as King. Neither title can be ignored or given priority over the other. They both remain central to our dealings with God, or neither has any efficacy. We acknowledge God as both Father and King or we live without the true God in our lives. Just as it would do harm to our relationship with God if we were to approach him as “King” in our private lives, it does harm to our relationship with God when

we approach him as “Papa” in our public lives. God does not act like Papa in our public lives any more than he acts like a King in our private life.

Put differently, if God does not rule and govern as “King” in our public life, our private relationship with him as “Father” is a sham. If we do not know him as “Abba” in our private lives, we can never know him and be governed by him as King in our public lives.

The duality of our being and the duality of our relationship with God has not been appreciated as it must be. It is common to excuse individuals’ immoral choices as citizens with the rationalization, “Oh, but he/she is basically good.” What we mean, of course, is that in their private life, he or she is, allegedly, sexually upright. He or she goes to church. He or she visits sick people, bakes bread for neighbors, gives time and energy to assist people in moving, etc., etc.” All the while, however, that same basically good he or she is a despicable citizen, supporting immoral and unchristian policies and leaders. Such two-faced hypocrisy does not pass muster. To be called “good” or “Christian,” we must be true to both roles God—Father and King—plays in their lives. This, Jesus plainly taught.

## Two commandments

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We are well acquainted with Jesus’ answer to the question, “Which is the great commandment in the law?”

“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”<sup>11</sup>

Surely, Jesus intends his audience to understand that every one of the law’s prescriptions can be subsumed within one of these two commandments. There is a private devotion to God and a more public devotion to others. However, given King Benjamin’s reminder that “when ye

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<sup>11</sup> Matthew 22.<sup>36-40</sup>

are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God,”<sup>12</sup> there is a great deal of overlap. The wall of separation between the two is flimsy indeed.

Commandments cannot be strictly categorized into separate columns—“love of God”/“love of man”—as if they are akin to bugs, pinned to an entomology board, based on species, genus, family, etc.

Just as powerfully, it seems to me, Jesus’ contention that there are but two commandments—those of private devotion to God and those of public service toward others—reminds us and teaches us that we humans are of two parts: we are individuals with a private life and we are citizens with a public life. It is not enough to be humble, respectful, appreciative, and worshipful in our private devotion to God. We must also be devoted to our fellow citizens in our public life. There is no clearer view of our public life than that in which we act as citizens of our community, our state, our nation, our planet. Jesus’ followers are good and just and thoughtful and exemplary citizens. We who would claim discipleship and loyalty to Jesus are both devoted to God in our private life and show devotion to our fellow beings in our public life as citizens.

### **a** king and his judgement

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Now, I have no real idea what the final judgement will look like, so I’ll not be dogmatic about it. But, I will offer the reader something to chew on. We probably all like, as I do, the idea of being judged, finally, by a merciful and personable Father. However, in his Gospel, John records Jesus as declaring that

“The Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son.”<sup>13</sup>

This might come as good news, especially to those who unwisely continue to view God, the Father, as a sort of personification of “justice;” a god<sup>14</sup> who was so put out with humankind

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<sup>12</sup> Mosiah 2.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>13</sup> John 5.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Since such a view of God is, in my view, more indicative of human nature than of the Divine nature, I cannot capitalize this idolatrous god.

that he murdered his Only Begotten Son, a personification of “mercy,” in order to finally get over his offended honor and divine wrath, or to satisfy some alleged cosmic law that requires the shedding of human blood as recompense for human criminality. But, before we put on our party hats and start banging the drums, we might want to consider one of Jesus’ most profound parables, the last, in fact, that Matthew records.

“When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: and before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: and he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left.

“Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, ‘Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me.’”<sup>15</sup>

Here, consistent with John’s teachings, it is Jesus who acts as judge rather than God, the Father. Because Jesus is in all ways like his Father, is one with his Father, Jesus can, like his Father play the two roles—Father and King—in his relationship with us. In this parable, Jesus acts in the role of King as he passes judgment. He judges individuals based upon their treatment of others. Now, we can think of this in purely private terms. But, I believe, this is, at best, a mistake and, at worst, willful ignorance—ignoring of facts.

First, we note that in preparation for the judgment, the king “gathered all nations.” This might simply be a fancy way of saying “everyone.” But it might also be a reminder that humans are social beings, always living in groups, communities, societies, and nations. As such they are judged based upon public as well as private, individualistic actions.

Second, I would have the reader consider how much good any of us can really do all on our lonesome. How many hungry people can any one of us feed on our own and out of our own

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<sup>15</sup> Matthew 25.<sup>31-36</sup>



resources? How many people's thirst can we alleviate as individuals? How many "strangers" will any of us personally meet, let alone help? How many poor can we clothe acting alone? How many sick and imprisoned can we visit? To how many can we administer relief and healing? Over a lifetime, many dozens, perhaps, at best.

However, as members of society we each have the ability to serve not a few dozen vulnerable individuals over a lifetime, but millions and millions. By advocating and supporting public policy that meets the needs of these and other vulnerable populations, we can in any given moment contribute more service in their behalf than we could in many lifetimes.

There is simply no doubt about it. We can all have far more impact when united with others in service of the vulnerable than we can when we work as lone wolves. We can serve many more and more effectively as citizens demanding compassionate public policy.

Given that it is "King" who judges, separating the sheep from the goats, rather than "Father," we should certainly read this parable in light of the quality of our citizenship. Those who served so well in the parable, served well in their role as public beings as well as in their private lives.

Finally, consistent with King Benjamin's insight, we are to see the face of God when looking into the face of society's vulnerable. We cannot serve the King when we refuse to serve, both privately and publicly, other citizens of whatever nation we are a part.

## Conclusion

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In our lives, God is both Father and King. He dictates what we are and what we do as both private and public beings. We will be judged as much for the kind of citizen we were as the kind of person we were in our private life. While the cute little ditty, "no other success can compensate for failure in the home," attempts to teach an important message, it is a highly exaggerated celebration of the private man or woman.

Now, as I have so often said, there was a time when I might have left it at that and said amen. But no longer. Consistent with my post-2016 U.S. presidential election determination—strengthened by the election of 2020—to abandon the still-small-voice style preaching that has, in my view, shown itself to be so ineffectual when aimed at a hardened people who have stopped their hearts and hardened their hearts, I will now turn to my new loud and thunderous preaching voice. I will not ask the reader to guess my meaning or application of today's homily.

Tens of millions of Americans voted for a godless Caligula in 2016. Nobody is perfect, not even false Christians who voted for him the first time around. But, with tens of millions of Americans once more sucking from the teat of Lucifer in 2020, what was “merely” blasphemous in 2016 has shown itself to be an act of willful perdition in 2020.

To be a true disciple of Jesus, one must follow his example of compassion and service, especially a compassion and service that is aimed at the vulnerable. Such discipleship includes public and cooperative service as well as private and individual service. I do not give a damn for one's private “goodness” and “kindness” who then turns and supports attitudes, behaviors, and policies of public officials and their administrations that are abusive and deceptive. Such citizens cannot hide behind the fact that they have not personally raised their hand against another or let loose a lie from their own lips. As Mormons act as proxies for their kindred dead, so do governments act as proxies for their supportive citizens. Governments' ugly and abusive policies and deceptions are every supportive citizen's upraised hand and lying lips.

Disciples of Christ do not oppress others, either privately or through support of oppressive public policy. Jesus' disciple do not support, for example, leaders that inflict a lifetime of emotional trauma upon innocent children by instituting immigration policies that call for those children to be ripped from their parents' arms, caged like animals, and abused. The Bible could not be clearer about this, as we have demonstrated repeated on the pages of this site.

Disciple of Jesus are not so callused in their duty as citizens as to heed the lies of a sociopath,

and thereby refuse to wear a mask during a pandemic in order to safeguard the health of their fellow citizens. Those who rebel against the compassionate and charitable wearing of a mask at the lying behest of what amounts to a cult leader have shown themselves to be anti-Christ, ungoverned and ungovernable by the Divine King.

Disciple of Jesus are not so spiritually undiscerning that they cannot see the satanic will to power behind a leader's call to arms—that a people or nation think of themselves and itself as superior to and deserving of more than any other people or nation. Neither through private nor public means does a disciple of Christ put his or her own needs above those of another, especially at the expense of another. No, disciples of Jesus strive, however imperfectly, to “Let this mind be in [them], which was also in Christ Jesus:” that “in lowliness of mind” they “esteem other better than themselves.” They “look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.”<sup>16</sup>

Would-be disciples of Jesus who do fall prey to the satanic use of power that America's Caligula represents are more than poor, despicable citizens. They are, in fact, not disciples at all. They are not sheep. They will not settle comfortably on the right hand of “Father.” Having denied God's rule as “King” in their public lives, they are, at best, goats, destined for the left hand of God. At worst, they are wolves ,devouring every innocent, vulnerable thing in sight in order to feed their monstrously insatiable appetite and subdue what is surely the insecurity that comes with the godlessness of their private and public feelings, thoughts, and actions.

Let the reader of this homily beware. Let it serve as a warning cry. Our public life as a citizen devoted to the welfare of society's most vulnerable had better be as good as our private life of devotion to God and our private life of service toward others. Otherwise, we will, “with the wicked, lift up [our] eyes in hell, being in torment.”<sup>17</sup>

Even so, come, Lord Jesus.

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<sup>16</sup> See, Philippians 2.<sup>3-5</sup>

<sup>17</sup> DC 104.<sup>18</sup>