In the world of mythology and in literature about kings and kingdoms one recurring motif is – what happens when a usurper sits upon the throne rather than the true king?

In some stories the usurper will begin to suffer illness his family may suffer and over time the whole kingdom may enter a period of darkness - think Shakespeare’s Macbeth. Crops begin to fail. Fertility declines. As darkness covers the land. And only when the rightful king assumes the throne can a kingdom begin to flourish again and the land becomes productive.

This notion of who should rightfully sit upon the throne is sometimes used in connection with spiritual life. Our prayer book catechism asks “What is sin?” Sin is the seeking of our will instead of the will of God, thus distorting our relationship with God, with other people, and with all creation. And when this happens “Sin has power over us because we lose our liberty when our relation with God is distorted.”

Many of you who read the Gospel of Luke during Lent and are now are reading Acts during Eastertide know what I’m talking about. Before Jesus’ resurrection examples abound of people doing their own will instead of seeking to do God’s will. Sitting on the throne of their own soul rather than acknowledging the Kingdom of God. Think King Herod when out of his fear and anxiety and thirst for power ordered all the infant boys born at the same time as Jesus to be slaughtered. Think Pilate the Roman governor who ordered Jesus’s crucifixion even though Pilate knew him to be innocent. Think the Sadducees and the Pharisees who tried over to suppress the freedom and forgiveness that Jesus offered the people. And even the disciples sat on their own thrones when they began argue about who was the greatest, even though Jesus had showed them that the greatest are servants of others.

Nearly every time these sought their own will instead of God’s will and conflict, or destruction, or death was the outcome. I can’t help but think this is the root is of so many of today’s troubles. We have forgotten that this world and all that is in it is God’s world. We are merely stewards of it for a
short time and our highest calling in life is to live out Jesus’ prayer “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done. On earth as it is in heaven.

But in the Book of Acts something has changed. Something is happening. People who had been self-centered in Luke are different in Acts. Men like Peter who had been fearful in Luke have now become rocks of courage. And others who had been deserters or doubters are now steadfast in Christ. And in the name of Christ healing is coming to people, offerings for the poor are being distributed and people are actually experiencing the peace of Christ that surpasses understanding. Christ is alive Christ is risen. But this time, Peter and the others are putting him at the center. And so Christ not only lives, but now he lives in them. And that makes all the difference.

Marcus Halley writes in Forward Day by Day “When we realize that we are not the centers of the universe we begin the process of ceding that center to God and as the new and rightly placed center of our lives God opens our eyes and ears to people around us about whom God is concerned, the hurting, the lost, the lonely and the least.”

Last fall Michael and Patricia and I were on our way back from continuing education lectures in Sewanee. And late in the day as we were traveling across West Tennessee, it was my turn to drive. But when I got behind the wheel the sun was starting to get in my eyes and so I borrowed some sunglasses. It also happened on my watch that day that the sun began to set. And so later that later evening as it grew darker, I turned the headlights on on Michael’s car. And It did help a little. But as it continued to grow darker I was really having trouble seeing. And so I began to adjust the headlight switch to be sure that I had them turned on correctly. Eventually, as I was talking to Michael about this he got involved. and told me how to turn them on to the right setting.

Still, I was having trouble seeing. And beginning to complain. “Michael, I think you may need to get your headlights checked. Are you sure this is as bright as they’ll go?” At point though Michael finally noticed the problem wasn’t with the headlights. He said “You’ve still got sunglasses on.” I couldn’t believe it. And We all three laughed. No wonder I couldn’t see. The problem wasn’t with the lights. It was with me. It was amazing how well I could see when I took the sunglasses off. In a small way I believe this
points to power of what Christ does in our lives when put Him at the center – when we vacate the throne that rightfully belongs to Him.

Saint Paul said this “If anyone is in Christ there is a new creation. Everything old has passed away. See, everything becomes new.” For In Christ, we do begin to see things we’ve never noticed before and begin to see others in a whole new light and our hearts break open as we become sensitive to needs of the others. And doing God’s will become more important than our own. And over time we discover a great freedom in Christ as we come to know more and more this truly is God’s world, God’s in charge, which means we don’t have to be. And with God at the center, the game of thrones is over.