

FROM DECEMBER TO DECEMBER

Sermon, December 3, 2017

The First Sunday of Advent

Fifty-seven years ago today ... December 3, 1960 ... at the Majestic Theatre on Broadway, the musical *Camelot* opened (*twice before in my tenure here this anniversary fell on the first Sunday in Advent ... 2000 and 2006 ... and I drew attention to this on those Sundays as well!*). The script was based on the King Arthur legends as adapted from the Terrence Hanbury White novel *The Once and Future King*, which was published two years earlier in 1958 (*the novel was actually a compilation of TH White's five books written during the World War II years: Book One, The Sword in the Stone; Book II, The Queen of Air and Darkness; Book III, The Ill-Made Knight; Book IV The Candle in the Wind; Book V, The Book of Merlyn*). Now, I know a 1960 musical is not exactly a "fresh" illustration, especially for anyone here younger than I ... in fact, I was in first grade when it premiered, and really don't remember the Broadway version at all myself ... but bear with me, I think this debut anniversary is a wonderfully appropriate anniversary to note on this first Sunday in Advent for reasons I'm about to explain. With Richard Burton as Arthur, Julie Andrews as Guinevere, and Robert Goulet as Lancelot, the musical *Camelot* ran for 874 consecutive performances. The movie version of the musical came out 1967, starring Richard Harris as Arthur, Vanessa Redgrave as Guinevere, and Franco Nero as Lancelot. I do remember the movie version well, having watched it ten or eleven times over the years.

This morning we see the Advent candles signifying the gifts of Hope, Love, Joy and Peace; well, *Camelot* is the story of long-ago England, a nearly-perfect time when Hope, Love, Joy and Peace abounded during the time of the legendary Knights of the Round Table, and it never rained before eight o'clock in the evening. The motto of the Round Table was, in part, "*Might for right. Right for right. Justice for all.*" Arthur was taught from boyhood by Merlin to challenge the prevailing concept that *Might makes right*; rather, *Right* isn't determined by who is strongest, or by what one can get away with. *Right* is *Right* because it's *right*. And we should use our *Might* to promote, defend, guard and protect what is *Right*. As an aside, that's something hopefully being learned by the forty-seven creeps **and counting** (according to USA Today) in the news since Harvey Weinstein's abuses came to light; lechers who used their positions of might and dominance for base and, frankly, perverted harassment of vulnerable people. I think the current Lecher of the Week is Garrison Keillor, who was preceded by NBC's Matt Lauer. On a related note, and I've pointed this out before, but something isn't wrong just because the Bible says it's wrong. No, the Bible says it is wrong because it *IS* wrong; that's an important distinction! Again, "*Might for right. Right for right. Justice for all.*" *Might* shouldn't be misused for un-righteous purposes, it must be used *FOR* right, to defend and promote and protect and uphold right and good.

Camelot is also the story of how all this hope was dashed, disrupted and eventually destroyed by passion, power and betrayal. Like Adam and Eve in Eden, Arthur's wife, Guinevere, and his best knight and trusted ally, Lancelot, eventually wound up destroying Paradise by violating the right and grasping after forbidden fruit.

When Lancelot and Guinevere are caught, Lancelot escapes, but Guinevere is sentenced to die by burning at the stake, in accordance with the law. Arthur, who has promoted the rule of law throughout his life, can make no special exceptions for his beloved Queen; even though it pains him immensely, the law must be carried out (*edited out of the spoken sermon was this excerpt from the movie: Mordred, to Arthur about Guinevere -- "What a magnificent dilemma! Let her die, your life is over; let her live, your life's a fraud. Which will it be, Arthur? Do you kill the Queen or kill the law?"*). Arthur cannot exercise raw authority to disregard that law; *Might* does not make *Right*. In a climactic scene, Lancelot returns to save her (*to the secret delight and relief of Arthur*); he rescues Guinevere at the stake. However, in carrying out this rescue, Lancelot and his men killed several guards and knights, and the knights of Arthur want revenge.

In the final scene of the cinema version, Arthur is sadly and reluctantly preparing for the battle against Lancelot and his forces in what promises to be a most destructive civil war, and England appears headed into the Dark Ages. In the early morning mists, Arthur is alone, and discovers a boy hiding in the bushes with bow and arrows at the ready. The boy is about twelve years old. Arthur questions the boy, who tells the king that his name is Tom. "*I'm Tom, m'lord ... Tom, from Warwick.*" (*That's Warwick, England, by the way; he's not from Warwick, Rhode Island*). Tom then tells Arthur why he is there. "*I've come to fight for the Round Table. I intend to become a Knight of the Round Table.*" The king, seeing all that is coming unglued in his kingdom, disillusioned about the shattered dreams, asks Tom, with a touch of despairing cynicism in his tone, "*And when did you decide upon this extinct profession? Was your father a knight? Was your mother saved by one? Was your village protected by knights?*" Tom's reply was simple, yet profound. "*Oh, no, m'Lord,*" he says. "*I only know of them - the stories people tell.*"

