

Presidents or Kings©

John 18:33-37; Revelation 1:4b-8

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This morning those who observe the liturgical church calendar, as we are, are celebrating the Feast of Christ the King. It is the last Sunday of the church year. We look back on where we've been, on all we've accomplished as Christ's Body, and we celebrate the mission and ministry that we have been about, the things we feel were successful.

We give thanks, at the end of this church year and of course, we have just given thanks at the celebration of our American Tradition we call Thanksgiving - for the blessings and all the richness in our lives.

But, just as many of us do when we celebrate a new year coming, we also review and reflect on the places that were not so good: we remember mistakes we made, relationships lost, those things and people we grieve over, the areas where we failed and the places in our past where we need to ask for forgiveness.

And then we watch the ball drop and sing "Auld Land Synge" and we kiss someone close to us and drink a toast to the New Year ... a new beginning, a hope for a brighter day coming ...

And, as the church, the Body of Christ, we look toward Advent, starting next Sunday – the advent of a new year, of a new beginning, of Christ's kingdom entering anew into our old worn out way of life.

But this Sunday isn't just about looking back or looking forward. It is, for the people who follow Christ Jesus, a time to think about whether or not he truly is the King – king of our hearts, our minds, our love, and our lives.

And is Jesus a king here and now – or somewhere in the future, somewhere in another kingdom?

This kind of talk is a bit odd for us, isn't it? We Americans have just elected a president. We are a democracy! We don't have a king or a queen, or a ruler. We don't have kingdoms or castles or princes and princesses. That is for other countries who may still have them but even *they* don't have the power they used to have.

And yet, when you think back on the election that was heated and rather nasty on both sides, there was a hint of the candidates saying, “Vote for me, and save yourselves. Vote for me and I will save the country.” Most of us are smart enough to know that one American President doesn’t have all the power to save or destroy a country. Nope, it takes a whole bunch of politicians, along with the president, to do that.

But those debates kind of remind me a bit (just little bit) of the discussion between Pilate – the governor – who represented the king of the day – Herod, and Jesus – who was being accused of saying he was the King of the Jews.

From early on – at least in Matthew and Luke – we get this foreboding sense that there is eventually going to be a fight over whom will be the ruler. We heard of King Herod (an earlier Herod than the one at the time of Jesus’ trial) who was so concerned about losing power that he had baby Jesus hunted for and many baby boys killed, just in case.

Now, Jesus is standing before Pilate, at this trial that was drummed up by Jesus’ own people – the Jewish leaders (who themselves were afraid of losing power).

Pilate asks, “Are you the king of the Jews?”

Jesus’ answer is a good one. Ask a question to answer a question. “Are you asking me this on your own, or did someone else tell you this?”

Pilate answers: ‘I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?’

And so it goes – back and forth – ending with Jesus sort of admitting that he is a king. “My kingdom is not from this world otherwise my followers would rise up and not let me be handed over to you.”

So, what *world* is Jesus the king of? Is it a future world; a kingdom that is somewhere in another realm, or one that is yet to come? If that is the case, then what are we doing, what are we saying today? Are we proclaiming that Christ is king *now*, or that Christ *will* be king in a future time – a time he has promised will come with his return?

Does it matter? It does, doesn't it? Because if Christ is the king of some future realm that isn't yet, what does that have to do with how you and I live, with the choices we make or the priorities we set in this earthly life?

If Christ is the king of our lives now and king here on earth today – regardless of who is president or how messed up the economy is or how things don't appear to be ruled by the Prince of Peace – if he is the King of the Here and Now – we probably will make some very different choices in our lives!

So what do you think? If I ask you if Jesus is King, as his follower, would you answer yes? I think most of us would. And I think most of us believe that he is. But do we really think about what it means for our daily living?

Because living with Christ the King means truly allowing him to be the one who rules, right? It means that we really do love one another as he loves us; it means loving God with all that we are and loving our neighbor (meaning everybody in the world) as we love ourselves.

With Christ as King, it means we put ourselves last and we serve others and are not greedy about making sure we have our due or getting ourselves ahead at the expense of someone else.

It means we carry out the mission and ministry of the church – the calling we have as his people – to actually tell others about his love and about the cross and about what God's grace and forgiveness means for us and them.

It means that we put people before buildings, houses, riches, fame and glory. It means we live as if we already are in his kingdom; as if it is already established and here.

And that is no easy task when we look at the world around us and we see war and hear of rumors of war and we see violence and decay and power struggles and evil.

It is sure hard to see the kingdom of God in this day and age, isn't it?

And yet – and yes, there is that “and yet!”

And yet, we see little signs that the kingdom of Christ is here. Where? Look around! We see it in the fruits of the Spirit – what are they? Peace, joy, love, patience, kindness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. We see it in those little random acts of kindness and love that spring up out of what seems like nowhere.

We see signs of Christ's kingdom as children are baptized and new members join the church; as we come to the table to break bread and drink from the cup; we experience the kingdom in the passing of the peace; in the forgiveness from a friend, in the confessing of sin and the assurance of pardon. We get little glimmers of the kingdom as we celebrate the traditions of the church calendar.

With the coming of the season of Advent, we will be reminded again that Christ's coming is that which is "now, but not yet." He has come; he is here now; but he is still to come! "The kingdom of God is very near," Jesus said. But he also said "The kingdom of God is upon us."

Christians are people who do spend time looking back. We look at where we've been. We have a history that is connected with the people of God from the beginning of creation.

We look at the time when God sent his Son, Jesus, and we celebrate both his life and his death, for in those we have found our life, our salvation, our transformation.

As Easter people, we proclaim the resurrection of Christ risen and in that resurrection we have firmly planted our hope and faith in the power of God to resurrect us from death to life.

Yes, as we end this liturgical year of the church calendar, we do look back with our eyes wide open to face the good, the bad and the ugly but all of it accompanied by Christ our King. We see that we were never alone, not for one second. We have always been with Christ our Lord (or at least he has always been with us). For we know that there is no place and not a thing that can ever separate us from his love – not even ourselves and our own ignorant actions.

But we are also people who look ahead. We do long for that day to come when Christ is visibly King to the world; when peace is the rule; when love is the dominating force; when the lion lies down with the lamb or at least we see life in that gentle, calm, loving way.

For now, though, we are living in that “in-between kingdom” where Christ Jesus has come, where Christ is here, and where he is yet to come. We are here in this now – this present time of 2,012, rapidly coming upon a new year. We have to make life choices that help us live in this world.

But, let us always remember that whatever we see or experience; that contrary to what seems obvious, Christ Jesus did come and we are already in his kingdom right here and now – even if it isn’t finished yet.

May our choices and our way of life – be a part of the signs that show that His kingdom is very near and that whatever is going on around us – we choose Christ to be King of our lives.

May our love, our kindness, our gentleness, our forgiving ways, our putting others first – may all we do and say be little signs of the Kingdom of Christ on earth.

‘I am the Alpha and the Omega’, says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.

Now to him who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood, and made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.