

November 21, 2021 - Last Sunday after Pentecost

2 Samuel 23:1-7; Psalm 132:1-13; Revelation 1:4b-8; John 18:33-37

“The Reign of Christ”

Today we mark the end of another liturgical year, and what a year it has been. At this time last year we were also offering public worship services which were influenced by social distancing, mask wearing, and hand sanitizing with the idea that it would only be a short-term inconvenience. As much as we may have hoped for a change in those conditions by now it seems we are being required to adapt to a very different world. As we think of this today we are asked to consider another very different world - the world of the Bible and the coming kingdom of Christ. The people we read about in the Bible faced some challenges as well and just as in those days from our past the people who have been placed in positions of leadership in our present age have been faced with unexpected and quite serious challenges as we move through this time. That is the nature of human leadership. In our constitutional monarchy here in Canada the opportunity for us to choose our leaders from time to time is part of our responsibility and history will make comments about our choices. In contrast, during the days of David or during the days of Jesus the way people came into positions of authority was quite different. The rulers were those who were either appointed by God or who obtained the throne through conquest. In David's case we know that he was chosen and anointed by the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as part of the ongoing covenant relationship between Almighty God and the descendants of Abraham. Within David's very imperfect time as ruler we can see some hints of glory and in his final speech before his death (2 Samuel 23) David mentions some of the things he has learned from God about ruling the people of God. David declared “The God of Israel has spoken, the Rock of Israel has said to me: One who rules over people justly, ruling in the fear of God, is like the light of morning, like the sun rising on a cloudless morning, gleaming from the rain on the grassy land” (2 Sam. 23:3,4) Ruling justly and in the fear of God were the two primary components which David learned at the hands of God and he wished to share that knowledge at the end of his earthly life. David's time on the throne foreshadowed an even greater kingdom which would be ruled by a distant descendant who, like his ancestor, would rule the people justly and in the fear of God. That descendant, of course, was Jesus the Messiah of God - who was also appointed by God. He too was, and is, a different kind of ruler. Since Advent Sunday last year we have been following Jesus through his life and ministry as guided primarily by the words of St. Mark and St. John. We see in Jesus' life and ministry a ruler who lives a life devoted to the ways of God and who loves the people whom God has placed in his kingdom. It is this reality that we celebrate on this last Sunday of the liturgical year as we focus our attention on the “Reign of Christ”. This reign intersects the reign of the leaders on this earth and each kingdom affects the other during this time before the return of Christ. We meditate on the reality that the kingdom into which we have been translated is not like the kingdoms of this world but is a kingdom that is ruled justly by Jesus the Messiah. We became citizens of

this kingdom of heaven through baptism and we give ourselves to the task of living out that reality in this life.

What sort of ruler is Jesus? What are some of the elements of his kingdom that differ from elements of the “kingdoms” we see around us? One of the important elements of the kingdom of heaven is seen in the way ordinary members of the kingdom are regarded. Among the sometimes surprising facts regarding the reign of Christ is his announcements of sharing his wonderful and loving rule with his disciples. In the book of Revelation John writes a doxology which has some very important elements within it. “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 forever and ever. Amen.” (Rev. 1:5b-6). I would like us to take a closer look at some of these points

First, John declares, Jesus freed us from our sins by his blood. What that looks like was described in a way in C.S. Lewis’ book “The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe”. In that story the character Aslan rescues Edmond from the White Witch’s clutches by sacrificing himself and thereby transfers Edmond from the rule of the White Witch to Aslan’s rule and governance. Jesus’ sacrifice has done the same and more for us. We have been transferred from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light, not by our own efforts but by the efforts of the God who loves us more than we can imagine. In those few words John communicates a depth of meaning that takes even the most scholarly among us years to explain and yet can be grasped by the youngest child. “Jesus loves me, he who died, heaven’s gate to open wide. He will wash away my sin, let this little child come in”. The freedom we obtain as a gift from God allows us to begin to become the very best we can be.

Second, John declares, Jesus has made us to be a kingdom. A kingdom is made up of people who are united under one banner and who work together for the health and well being of all within the kingdom. Our adoption into God’s family assembles us as members of Jesus’ kingdom. Regardless of what it looks like from the outside this is the reality in which we live. Jesus’ authority and protection governs our days. In this kingdom the poor and lowly are elevated to share life with the rich and famous. Tears are wiped away and health and healing are made available from the hands of the ruling king. We are part of a transforming and transformative community that stretches back in time to the very beginning and will continue until the ending of all things and beyond. In this kingdom its citizens experience the life of the King which has an eternal quality. Much more can be said about this short little sentence but I will leave that to your thoughts and imagination.

Third, John declares, Jesus has made us all priests serving God the Father. A priest, as John describes, is a kind of a mediator between humanity and their creator. The people in Jesus’ kingdom are to stand in the gap, in a way similar to what Jesus did, and pray to God for the people around them and declare to them the truths about God. The priests serving in God’s temple in Jerusalem were to respond

to the needs of the poorest people in tangible ways by supporting the widows and orphans. They were to be the people to whom the ill would go and receive ministrations to affect their healing. The historical evidence tells us that there were times during which this was done well and times when it was done poorly. When the Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed much of that organized care was disrupted but God had another way for it to be offered. What Jesus' reign brings about is not a single location in which those things take place but a scattering of people interacting with the kingdom of this world while serving God as priests. In order to help to explain this action Jesus used images of yeast, salt, and light to describe the ways in which his kingdom would influence and affect the kingdom of this world.

The intersection of the kingdoms of this world and the kingdom of heaven is where we exist during this troubled season on earth. As we contemplate the Reign of Christ let us also meditate on the reality that as living members of Christ's mystical body we are already part of Jesus' kingdom and we will one day be joined in a wonderful way to the resurrected community of the saints. As we go about our days may we be even more conscious of our identity as children of the King of kings and allow that reality to guide our thoughts and our actions. Jesus came to announce the plan of God to change things on earth and restore the original plan of paradise and those who have responded to his call have been 'ordained' as fellow workers in that task. So, as we come to the end of another liturgical year may we look back and see the ways in which we have been able to live out this reality and ask forgiveness for the times when we have missed the mark. Jesus' sacrifice continues to cleanse us from our sins and set our feet back on the path of living in his kingdom.

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