

God's Promise – Christ Will Reign

Today is the Reign of Christ, or the Feast of Christ the King. Or to give it its official name: the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe. Which is quite a mouthful, so Reign of Christ is a much easier name to use. There are many names given to the feast today. It is a little unusual as it is one of the human-created celebrations in the church year.

We have many biblical event celebrations – one where we celebrate or commemorate events described in the Bible.

Such as – Christmas, Advent, Epiphany, Lent, Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter Sunday, Ascension Day and Pentecost.

We have commemorations of the lives of some of the saints, such as Andrew, Bede, Columba, David and George.

Then we have a few human-created celebrations, that are not connected to a Bible story or the life of a specific individual. Such as – Trinity Sunday, Holy Cross Day and the Reign of Christ or the Feast of Christ the King. They are all grounded in the Bible and they all celebrate part of the arc of the biblical story, a core theological understanding.

Last week there were some questions about today's feast in the service bulletin. The answers are posted in the parish hall. The second question was:

The Reign of Christ Sunday is having a birthday this year. When was it instituted?

- a. 1925 - 100 years old
- b. 1625 – 400 years old
- c. 1425 - 600 years old
- d. 825 - 1200 years old

If you selected the first option, instituted in 1925 and it is therefore 100 years old; then you are correct. Unlike many of our other celebrations it is a recent creation.

Originally observed at the end of October, it was moved to the last Sunday in Ordinary time, or the Sunday before the First Sunday of Advent, and thus to the end of the liturgical year, in 1970.

Originally, it was referred to as Christ the King Sunday. However, for some, perhaps even many people, the image of a king is not always positive. The term can be associated with dominion, overlord, tyranny, abuse of power, cruelty, oppression, war and warriors. A "King" can have other titles such as emperor, sovereign, monarch, ruler, potentate, czar, sultan, khan, shah, pharaoh, sheikh and Caesar. Changing the name does not change the abuse that some of them have inflicted on the population under their domain.

Whatever the title there is an image of a person with magnificent power and pomp who rules in great contrast to those over whom he is exalted.

Yet our readings speak of a very different king, of a reign that looks and feels quite unlike anything we have known, different from a human king. Through our readings there are illusions to and reminders of the whole arc of God's relationship with humanity and all of creation.

The arc stretches from the story of God's creation of all things in heaven and on earth as told in the Book of Genesis all the way through to the Revelation to John and the description of the coming kingdom.

We are reminded of the exile to Egypt, the slide into slavery, the exodus, the journey through the wilderness for 40 years and the eventual and glorious entry into the promised land.

We are reminded of God's promise to restore the people of Israel after their exile to Babylon, the promise of shepherds to bring the scattered people back to the fold and that they will be fruitful and multiply.

Along with the promise of a ruler from the house of David who, as Jeremiah describes it, the ruler "shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land." (Jeremiah 23:5)

In Zechariah's prophecy, the father of John the Baptist, recites some of the promises of God as he welcomes and gives thanks for the birth of his son John. How John the Baptist is the fulfillment of God's promise that they would be saved from their enemies and from the hands of all who hate them. That John will go before the Lord "to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people by the forgiveness of their sins." (Luke 1:76-77) There will be "light for those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace." (Luke 1:79)

Even in the deeply humiliating account of Jesus crucifixion we hear a man who has been mocked reach out in love to one of the others crucified with him, and give him the promise of eternal life that is ours also, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

As we arrive at the end of the church year we gather together the many pieces of the story of our relationship with God. Central to the story is a God who created us and the world around us in all its abundant and magnificent variety.

Of a God who loves us so much that we are called back into relationship, time and time again; into relationship with God and with each other. Of a God who loves us so much that he sent his only Son, to live as one of us and to die for us. We gather to celebrate the reign of Christ, the reign of peace, the reign of justice, the reign of truth.

A little later in the service we will recite the prayer that Jesus taught us, the Lord's Prayer. As we say it, I invite you to ponder the second petition, "Your kingdom come." God already reigns in heaven, but the prayer of Jesus is that the reign of God would be recognized, embraced and obeyed on this planet, in the same degree that it exists in heaven. We pray that God's kingdom comes, here, now.

For the world we live in is not a democracy but a kingdom. God owns the earth and all that is on it, and reigns over it. It is God's kingdom. God has appointed Jesus as the king of the earth. His kingdom has been established, but the world still exists in rebellion against the appointed king. As Jesus said, 'Pray that that kingdom will be as established on the earth, as it is in heaven.'

Our Father, in heaven, may your kingdom come. Amen.

Readings: Luke 23:33-43
Luke 1:68-79

Jeremiah 23:1-6
Colossians 1:11-20