

November 23rd, 2025

Reign of Christ

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of all our hearts be always acceptable in your sight O God our Rock and our Strength.

Today we celebrate the last Sunday after Pentecost commonly called the Reign of Christ. Just what is the “Reign of Christ?” How does this day relate to who we are as Christians in this complicated 21st Century World?

“Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has looked favourably on his people and redeemed them.”

These are the opening words of Canticle 19 – The Song of Zechariah. They are part of the prophecy spoken by Zechariah after the birth of his Son John. Zechariah has been unable to speak since being struck dumb due to his unbelief in the Angel Gabriel’s announcement that Zechariah and Elizabeth would become parents at their advanced age.

In the verses leading to today’s Gospel, Zechariah moves from disbelief, to shock, to belief, to joy, and finally to his proclamation of God’s promise being fulfilled.

In the Gospel we encounter a reading that is part of the horror that is Good Friday – a portion of the conversation that takes place is between Jesus and one of those who is to be crucified with him. How & why do we move from Joy to horror?

The authors of the lectionary have made it possible for us to journey from darkness to light and lean into the promise that the story doesn't end with this last Sunday of Pentecost - it is yet another beginning - a continuum that moves us always forward in our story as believers.

While we only hear a very small part of the Gospel Jesus offers prayers of forgiveness for those who carrying out the grizzly task of "dealing with Jesus." One criminal scoffs at Jesus – "Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!" The other challenges him "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong!" He then offers a plea to Jesus "remember me when you come into your kingdom." Jesus offers assurance to him – "today you will be with me in Paradise."

All of the scripture readings have some reference to being rescued, saved, or set free. Is there a part of us that resists or even rebels when we hear those words, believing that we have no need of being rescued, saved, or set free? What is behind those feelings of resistance or rebellion? Another common word among most of these scriptures is the word *fear* (or *afraid*). What causes us to fear? Are we afraid of admitting our needs to God, to others, or even ourselves? Think of times when we have been vulnerable with God and others. There is no shame in being vulnerable.

Setting aside this is part of the Passion story there is a lot to absorb here isn't there?

- Even as he is being prepared for crucifixion Jesus makes forgiveness a priority.
- Even as he hangs from the cross Jesus continues to be engaged with those who need love, hope, & forgiveness.
- The one criminal accepts he and the other criminal are guilty! They have been dealt with as they should have been for their crimes.
- The criminal who recognizes Jesus innocence does not ask for a miracle he simply asks to be remembered in the Kingdom of Heaven.
- Jesus offers the assurance he will find welcome in Paradise.

What does this say to us as followers of the one who was born, was crucified, and was resurrected for us?

- Do we recognize the power of Jesus forgiveness in and for our lives?
- Do we recognize that despite Jesus not being physical present on this earth – Jesus continues to offer God’s love, God’s hope, & God’s forgiveness.
- Do we recognize that we are the reason Jesus came upon the earth – that we might find new life apart from the powers that pull us away from relationship with God.
- There is room for all of us in Paradise – God through Jesus Christ makes that possible.

What an amazing opportunity we have! Even if we don’t fully recognize the one who was, is, and will continue to be in our life – we will be welcome to sit at the feet of the throne.

Can we envision an alternative “kingdom” that sets us apart from the rest of the world while keeping us engaged in the world because that is what we are called to be as Christians set aside and engaged! Make no mistake it is no easy task – but we are given strength for the undertaking through our relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

We are moving into the Season of Advent – a time of anticipation and preparation for the Birth of the one to be named Jesus. As we make this journey, we will be bombarded with all sorts of media advertisement - that tells us we really do need all they have to offer! We will be bombarded with never ending Christmas Music in stores, on Social Media, Hallmark Movies, to mention just a few, that are meant to keep us in the “Spirit”! We will be frustrated with the lack of parking and the pressure to buy, buy, buy, do, do, do until some of us just want to hide under the covers until it is all over.

That is not the Paradise Jesus refers to. The Paradise of Jesus is the one that sees the pain, the need, the loneliness, and yes, the disappointment of many, and responds as best as we are able with love and without judgement.

As beloved children of God we are given eyes to see, ears to hear, hearts to love, and spirits to move mountains.

We are called to proclaim God’s truth & Jesus as truth. We are called to let our light and our love shine in the darkness that threatens to overtake us. We are called to be bold in our faith and in our relationship with God through Christ and in our relationships with each other. We are called to love others as we have been loved. We are CALLED!

How do we do what we have been called to do? A day at a time, or an hour at a time, and sometimes maybe even a minute at a time. We are the Paradise – the Paradise Christ died to build. A Paradise of believers who have at the centre of their very being – the love of God which passes all understanding.

A prayer inspired by Psalm 46

In this present time, no matter what passes before us,
God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.
As earth shakes and nations are in an uproar,
God is present with us and is our refuge in times of trouble.
As the world trembles in fear and worry,
May we find stillness and peace, knowing God is God of all. “The kingdom
of this world;

We have come full circle in our Liturgical Year - but this isn't the end - it marks a time of renewal. May we live in the truth that it is possible to experienced both Joy & Horror and not lose hope.

