

11/25/2018

“Thankful for Christ’s Reign”

Scripture: Psalm 93; 2 Samuel 23:1-5; John 18:33-37; Revelation 14b-8

Series: Thankfulness

Theme: We are thankful for the reign of Jesus Christ, who is the fulfillment of God’s promise to David, of an everlasting kingdom of righteousness and peace. His kingdom is of heaven and includes all who would hear and receive his truth and walk in his way.

Today, we conclude our month-long series of thankfulness. We have considered all the saints who have come before us and those among us, who have been called by God and walk in faith. We have given thanks for all those who serve others in Christ’s name, both in and through the church; as well as others who have or do serve to secure, preserve, and share the values and freedoms we enjoy in our country. We have given thanks for God’s word, revealed through the Holy Scriptures and most perfectly in Jesus the Christ.

† **Today we give thanks for one of the promises and fulfillments of that word – the Lordship and reign of Jesus Christ and the kingdom of God.**

Those of us here today are blessed to live in a time and place where it might be difficult to imagine living in a monarchy; that is under the power and rule of one man or woman, a king or a queen. Yes, there are countries still in our world that have such forms of government, whether called a monarchy or not. And, while many live in peace and prosperity, others live in fear and hardship without many of the freedoms we hold so dearly or even take for granted.

Still, we know that our democratic form of government alone is no guarantee of peace and prosperity for all or even security for those who do have enough or plenty.

So, when we hear about the kingdom of God and the reign of Jesus Christ, what thoughts and feelings come to your mind?

Without going into too much detail today, let us just remember that the people living in Jesus’ day were all too familiar with kings and even emperors, who used their power for personal gain and ambition. And, most of Jesus’ own people, the Jews, were hoping that God would raise someone up among them who would replace the puppet king appointed by the Roman Emperor. So, when Jesus proclaimed that the kingdom of God was at hand (Mark 1:15), many repented and believed the good news. They believed that he was the long awaited one to redeem Israel and spread God’s peace to other nations as well. Yet, when he became a challenge to the established earthly political and religious powers, they sought to destroy him.

Being brought before Pontius Pilate, the Roman Governor of Judea, and asked if he was king of the Jews as some were declaring, he said, *“My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to*

prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place.” “You are a king, then!” said Pilate. Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.” (John 18:36-37 NIV)

Jesus was crucified by the Romans, was laid in a tomb, and was raised from death by the power of the Holy Spirit on the third day. After visiting and instructing his closest disciples for forty days, he sent them out to proclaim the good news of his kingdom and make disciples of all nations. He then ascended into heaven.

Fast forward some sixty years, John the Apostle was living in exile on the island of Patmos. He wrote the Revelation of Christ’s second coming, which he had received by the Holy Spirit, then addressed the early followers of churches in what was then called Asia, modern day Turkey.

Revelation 1:4b-8 (NRSV)

Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. 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.

Look! He is coming with the clouds; every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and on his account all the tribes of the earth will wail. So it is to be. Amen.

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

† **Until he comes, we who follow him and his way live here and now as part of his kingdom.**

On this final Sunday of the church year, Christ the King Sunday, the Rev. Dr. Heather Heinzman Lear, who serves as the Director of Evangelism at UM Discipleship Ministries, reminds of what it means to have a crucified King who isn’t merely seeking allegiance with our lips, but desires a fundamentally different way of us being in relationship with God and with one another. We worship a God who could forgive his executioners and minister to the thief on the cross next to him, while suffering his own unimaginable death on a cross.

So, while sometimes terrible things just happen, Christ our King is right there with us and has committed to be in solidarity with and in our suffering.

Lear points out that twice in the passage from Revelation, statements conclude with the pronouncement of, “Amen,” which translated means, “so be it.” So, may it be that we live into the freedom that Christ provides us to love and serve our neighbors. So, may it be that despite the current divisions and cruel criticism that constantly flow through our news and social media feeds, we embody the kingdom values Jesus espoused in Luke 4, Matthew 25, and elsewhere. So, may it be that Jesus Christ is King and Lord of our lives, rather than a political party’s ideals, our career ladder, our children’s achievements, or the pressure to portray ourselves as having everything together.

We have a God and King whose primary characteristic and value is love. We have a King who created humankind in God's image and called us "very good." We have a King who knows our pain, walked in our shoes, and showed us how to really love and be part of God's kingdom, even when it's really hard and unpopular. We have a King who walks with us now and promised to one day wipe away every tear, make all things new, and restore and redeem all of Creation.

And, on this last Sunday of the Christian calendar year, we can look forward to the beginning of the Advent Season next Sunday -- as we await our Savior and King with expectation, love, hope, joy, and peace.

Join us each week and live every day until Christ's return as part of his kingdom on earth!

Let us ever be thankful to be part of Christ's kingdom and reign on earth as in heaven. As he taught his first disciples -- and all of us -- to pray to the Father, "**Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.**" And, may all God's people say, Amen!