

Why didn't we speak that Psalm at the top of our lungs?! Why didn't we shout it so the folks on Broadway could hear us?! If ever there was a psalm to yell, Psalm 93 is it:

*The Lord is king, robed in majesty, and armed with strength!
You are from everlasting, You are mightier than the breakers
of the seas! Mightier is the Lord who dwells on high. Holiness
befits your house, O Lord, forever and forevermore!*

Hearing all that again, does it compel you to read it again with vigor, with conviction? To actually proclaim it? Does it draw out of you some sense of the mighty? I didn't think so.

Why did we merely speak it? Because such descriptions of God don't reflect the reality we see in our daily lives. This vision of God is not recognizable when we look around us. It's alien. These are great words and would that we lived in a world that showed them to be true. But the reality of such a vision remains hidden from us in the face of this world:

- The untold number of First Nations children being uncovered in the mass graves of Boarding Schools.
- The deafening corruption and wielding of power by state and national leaders around the world.
- The rising sea levels and the mass extinction of animals and ecosystems across the globe
- The rising death toll of Covid19, entering its third year.
- The growing number of murdered and missing aboriginal women in Montana, the western US and Canada.

These, along with realities local to Red Lodge, realities of your own, are some of the things that crowd against speaking this Psalm truly. As we speak they nag at the edges, catching the words in our throats, quieting our spirits, and stilling our voices. How can all this be if God reigns?

This is Reign of Christ Sunday - the final Sunday of the Liturgical Year. We “seal” the year on this last day in a statement of faith: “Christ is King.”

This is actually one of the youngest festival days in the Liturgical Calendar. First known as Christ the King Sunday, Pope Pius XI instituted it back in 1925. Think about the world back then - seven years after the end of the WWI, the amazing excess of the Roaring 20's, and nationalism brewing anew in Europe. Think about what was coming over the horizon - the Great depression, the bubbling over of German Nationalism, WWII and all the wars since. Indeed, since this day was instituted nearly constant war has plagued the globe. But with much of this in full view, something caused Pope Pius XI to put into words (and the proclamation of the Church) what was utterly un-apparent in the world at the time - The sovereign reign of Christ over all things.

If it sounds to you like a contradiction, we find it in our gospel reading today too, where we find Jesus on trial. In a world where “kings” act without consequence, our king is on trial. Pontius Pilate, the man who would eventually torture and kill our king, interrogates him with questions like, “What have you done?” and “Are you King of the Jews?” Jesus' reply clicks something into place for us, perhaps even cracking the edges of our view: “My kingdom is not of this world.”

While Jesus does not teach his disciples to pray in the Gospel of John, we know the line from other gospels: “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” In these words, Jesus was not only teaching his disciple and us to pray, he was teaching us to see the world in a different light. God so loves this world that we were sent Jesus, who saw our world clearly and wanted better for us than what we've been able to do on our own. So he gives us in these words the vision of a kingdom in which his gracious will is done - God's will that all people and all creation thrive.

This is the light of that distant kingdom to which we might hold our world, see it better, and shape it to a will not our own. For Jesus' kingdom is not of this world but it is for this world. “*For this I was born,*” he says, “*and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth.*” It is the ache of that paradoxical truth [that the kingdom once established for all time (with Christ at its head) still requires coming (still needs ‘arriving’)] that is part of the undercurrent of Jesus' trial here. The distance this kingdom, Jesus' “kingship,” has yet to travel we feel and we see and we know, and it stands in full relief here in the trial of Jesus.

It's the experience of this distance to which the books of Daniel and its younger, bigger brother Revelation is addressed.

Daniel in our Christian bible comes right after Ezekiel, another prophet that experienced “larger than life” visions like today’s reading. But in the Jewish scriptures (what we call the Old Testament) the books have a different order. In that order Daniel comes right after Esther - a book that “narrates the experience of a people in exile.” Seeing our reading from Daniel (this vision) with the eyes of exiles, we might encounter a surprising measure of comfort: “*His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, and his kingship is one that shall never be destroyed.*” It’s to the aching eyes of exiles, in the face of a broken world and their own broken lives, that Daniel holds this hopeful vision of a world ordered by the will of another - this one given all dominion and glory and kingship.

The book of Revelation was written for exiles of another age: Christians in a young and “still-becoming” faith trying to live in a world dominated by the Roman Empire. The author, named as John, writes to seven churches who faced persecution and corruption in this society. The introduction to the book in my *Lutheran Study Bible* says this: “The visions of Revelation address this question: Who or what is at the center of Christian Life? John uses bold and dramatic images to drive home the point that Christian life centers on Jesus Christ alone.” And so the book begins:

“Grace to you and peace from him **who is and who was and who is to come**... Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth... ‘I am the Alpha and the Omega,’ says the Lord God, **who is and who was and who is to come**, the Almighty.”

Here again, the paradox: The ruler of all time, who has yet to come; the grace and peace of the one powerful enough to give it, who, though he brings it, is yet to come. It is this “coming” that concerns us.

Our reading from the Gospel of John concludes with the words, “Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.”

I read an article this week whose title was the statement “*Climate change is a symptom of deeper planetary dysfunction.*” Ragan Sutterfield, the author, argues that the climate crisis points to a deeper sickness - “a wider network of extremely disturbed and disturbing patterns” that exist beyond the crisis itself. We live in a “system of dysfunction” that has resulted in the climate crisis. Moving toward (I assumed) the quick fix we’ve all been waiting for, she surprised me with this:

...as with so many aspects of our broken world, the real healing of injustice comes through a long walk of humble mercy and the repentance that means changed hearts and lives. If the church is going to take seriously the [disappearance] of three billion birds [in the last 50 years] and all that [this] means, then **we must seek the life of conversion that our discipleship demands of us.**

Her central question is this - *What will move us toward the reality of God’s reign?* Her answer? We need practices - “practices that, when enacted with grace and imagination, **open the way for a different reality to begin to grow within the ruins of the world as it is.**”

Whether we are talking about climate change, or the private “ruins” of our lives, the truth is that Jesus came into the ruins of this world as it is. The truth is that Jesus came saying “the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near”: This kingdom, though not of this world, is closer than we could have imagined. But it requires something of us: “Repent and believe this good news.” Christ the king, invites us, instructs us, walks with us, leads us and loves us into the world as it is | and the work of bringing his kingdom nearer yet.

To hold Christ at the center of our lives as Christians means that we look at the realities of the world, the realities of our lives, differently. Jesus orients us to these realities differently. With Christ at the center, we see it all from a place “dislodged” from despair. We see from a place of hope in which “grace and imagination” begin churning together with a clear eyed view of not only the world but our very lives. With Christ at our center, we begin to listen for his voice, and see that to which he invites us - not only to comfort and the consolation of our broken hearts, but to hope-filled action - practices that center Jesus in the work of our hands and feet.

This is what the Reign of Christ means: Under the “rule” of Christ who “loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood, we are made to be a beloved kingdom” in service of God’s purposes, God’s kingdom on earth. This belovedness, lavished upon us in baptism takes root, centering our gaze on the one who holds not only the broken realities of all the world, but the holy work [the full throated response] of bringing the kingdom of heaven ever nearer. In Christ, we shout in joy in the face of the realities that tear at our hearts, the realities that constrict our view of the world and our own lives. We make that joyful noise and we get to work.

Yes, the work. The decisions we’ll be making today about our budget next year and the cost of building a new church is part of that work. Christ stands in the center of such decisions for us who await his kingdom, not only in our lives but in the life of the world. This is why we state in faith that Christ Reigns today, standing on the threshold between the end of one year (one reality) and the beginning of another. For the truth is that Christ reigns, the Alpha and the Omega. So in all that has been, is now, and is to come, “Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”

AMEN