

‘Christ the King’ / ‘Reign of Christ’ Sunday

In this festival on the last Sunday of the church year we celebrate God’s reign over empires that do not thirst and hunger for righteousness, as Rev. Dr. Karoline Lewis has put it. This is a special commemoration of what we say and do each week in worship—to confess that Jesus is sovereign over all other entities that vie for power and dominion, to claim that all other empires and forces are beneath God, most especially those that do not advance the Kingdome of God.

As it is the last Sunday of the church year, the new church year begins next Sunday with the first Sunday of Advent, this is an “opportunity to look back on what have we done to further God’s reign” (Karoline Lewis, Sermon Brainwave) over the past year. And so I invite you to reflect on your faith journey over the past 12 months. This could be yours individually or even better, the faith journey of your community, your people, your congregation, because that is how faith is couched throughout scripture, as that of a community. And I will ask you to share now.

So, what were the peaks, pits, and praise from the previous year? What was the ‘peak,’ the best thing that happened? What was this past year’s ‘pit,’ the worst thing that happened? And where did you see God this year? That’s the praise part.

You are probably familiar with Matthew’s parable of the sheep and the goats. It is yet another in a line of stories of judgment. However, as opposed to those of the past few Sundays, this is a depiction of judgment

day itself. Those judged are divided into groups, right and left, sheep and goats. The delineating factor, whether each fed the hungry, gave drink to those who thirst, welcomed the stranger, clothed the naked, cared for the ill, and visited the imprisoned.

Jesus describes a system far better than many with good intent. It might seem obvious, but I must point out that Jesus doesn't espouse clothing the thirsty, visiting the naked, or especially in light of our pandemic, welcoming the ill. I am being glib, but I do so in service of a serious point. The service upon which the king or shepherd judges requires observation and responsiveness. We help people who need help. We help with difficulties that are present.

You are involved with ministries that do that here. The Ministerial Association's Blissfield Area Food Bank. The Knights of Columbus Food Drive. Gifts for Williston Home residents. Through these hungry are fed, thirsty are given drink, the ill are cared for.

Another congregation here in the upper midwest, United Church of Christ, had another response in the past few months. Seeing news reports of high incidences of viral spread within prisons, they decided to put on a mask collection and gathered hundreds of masks that were sent to the prison nearest their location. The officials therein were surprised and touched. They were distributed quickly among the population inside. Every recipient had been convicted of a crime. You may notice Jesus judged on whether the sheep and goats visited the imprisoned—without any caveat about white collar crime, acceptable offenses, or having Jesus in their hearts.

Where can we grow in our response to those who are in distress? What should we lift up, giving thanks that we have already responded?

I am thankful to God that we have been blessed with so much—and have such opportunity to share. Let us give God the glory! Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

Longing for Christ's reign to come among us, we pray for the outpouring of God's power on the church, the world, and all in need.

A brief silence.

Sovereign of all, train our ears to hear your cry in the needs of those around us. Bless all social ministries of the church through which we seek to serve others as we ourselves have been served. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

You cause rain to fall on the just and unjust alike. Direct our use of creation to provide for the needs of all people in ways that are sustainable for the earth. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Bring peace to every place where conflict rages (*especially*). Grant opportunities for ending divisions among us and usher in your reign of unity and reconciliation. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Heal the sinful divisions we erect between us and release us from systems of oppression and prejudice. Restore our capacity to see your image in those whose dignity we have stripped away (*especially*). Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Pour out the gifts of your Spirit on children and youth throughout the church. Sustain those who work in children's ministry, youth ministry, and campus ministry as they nurture the gifts of young people. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

Thank you for saints now departed who fed the hungry, clothed the naked, and tended to the sick. Inspire us by their example, that we may see your presence in those in need around us. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Receive our prayers in the name of Jesus Christ our Savior, until that day when you gather all creation around your throne where you will reign forever and ever.

Amen.