**Reign of Love and Compassion**

Reign of Christ Sunday

November 20, 2022

Genesis 1: 26-27

Luke 23: 33-43

As we gather for worship today, there are multiple special acknowledgements for this day internationally and as a church. In the church season it is Reign of Christ Sunday, what used to be called Christ the King, the Sunday before the season of Advent starts. Internationally it is Universal Children’s Day and Transgender Day of Remembrance. With so much to include about these important markers, the message will be a little longer this morning.

For us in the United Church, Reign of Christ Sunday has not been marked much in most churches. I have learned being here at the Living Spirit Centre with our Anglican and Lutheran friends that it is a much more important Sunday for them. For the United Church and many of us individually, Christ the King Sunday has shifted from a patriarchal honouring of Jesus as King of all nations and the only way to God, to honouring the Reign of Christ as a way of life and reflecting on what the Kingdom of God or God’s Shalom Community is, which Jesus preached and lived. It is about the kingdom being with us now, not some eternal reward after we die. This is evident in our reading today. When Jesus, dying on the cross, is asked by one of the criminals to remember him when he comes into his kingdom, Jesus responds, that he will be with him today in Paradise. One writer proposes that Jesus was not talking about a place, but in that moment, in the forgiveness Jesus offers him, in the relationship they then have, that is paradise. They are together in relationship, and that is God’s love and grace. Jesus honours the image of God in him, and brings him into the kingdom. Christ’s reign is about honouring each person as a divine creation of God’s image, being in relationship with them, and ensuring that they know they are loved and blessed. That is the Reign of Christ.

That is what is important as we think about this day of honouring the rights of children for International Children’s Day, and Transgender day of Remembrance, that we see the dignity and blessing of children and transgender people. The International day for Children, is about the rights of children internationally. Here in Canada while we might think we honour children well, one of the realities is that there are far too many children suffering in poverty. The rate of children in poverty in Canada is 10-14% depending on the source, so there is much more we can do to honour and care for children. UNICEF offers these markers as some of the indicators of child poverty:

• I don’t eat three meals a day.

• I don’t eat protein every day.

• I don’t eat fresh fruits or vegetables every day.

• I have nothing to play with outside.

• I don’t get to join after-school activities with my friends.

• I am not able to participate in school trips that cost money.

• I don’t have a quiet place to do my homework.

• I do not have access to the Internet.

• I never get new clothes.

• If my shoes get wet, I don’t have a second pair.

• I can’t invite friends over to my house to play.

• I don’t get to celebrate special occasions like my birthday.

The good news is that Canada’s poverty rate overall has been decreasing between 2015 and 2018, according to the government report. Here in Regina, if we can keep the commitment for Housing First in the 2023 budget, which will be discussed December 15 at City Council, this will be an important step to ending homelessness in the city. Both of which impact positively on children.

Today, November 20 is also International Transgender Day of Remembrance and these reflections are from the service prepared for this day by The United Church of Canada, and to be warned there will be references to suicide and murder. It began in the late 1990s to commemorate the life of an African-American trans woman named Rita Hester who was brutally murdered in Boston in 1998. Her death came just weeks after the murder of Matthew Shepard in Wyoming had roused a huge discussion on hate crimes against gay people, yet Rita's murder garnered no such response. Her murder and the lack of media attention to her death drove a candlelight vigil to begin in San Francisco the next year.

While we acknowledge that violence happens for many unjust reasons, today we honour the lives of those who were victims of violence because of their gender identity and gender expression. Due to the widespread ignorance and erasure of the experiences of trans people, this day is an important opportunity for us to intentionally bear witness to the hardships of the trans community.

Today on this International Transgender Day of Remembrance we gather together to

* remember and mourn all those trans people who have been victims of homicide
* honour the lives of those who might otherwise be forgotten
* restore dignity to those who have suffered extreme and humiliating violence
* become more aware of who is most vulnerable in our communities

We recognize that there are many diverse people gathered in this space. Some of us may just be beginning to learn and understand the reality of violence against trans people. We pray for courage, open minds and hearts, and persistence as we continue our journey.

Some of us may be gathered here full of pain and anger, knowing the reality of violence against trans people deeply in our hearts and experience. We pray for love, healing, and justice in the face of oppression.

Inspired by the movement that grew out of Rita Hester’s death, a web project titled “Remembering Our Dead” was created; it shares the story of transgender people from around the globe who have been murdered out of prejudice and hate. The site’s list goes back to the 1970s and documents the losses the trans community has felt over many years of mistreatment and marginalization.

Although the data is limited at best, there has been some effort in the last few years to record and analyze transphobic violence across the globe. One group that is leading this charge is the “Trans Murder Monitoring Project.” **Sadly, this year, there have been a total of 51 cases of reported killings of trans people in North America.** The most terrifying part of this figure is that, by their own admission, the project “can only provide a glimpse into a reality which is undoubtedly much worse than the numbers suggest.” Another sad reality is that there are no statistics for Canada, online. A statement of the work we still need to do.

In addition, those numbers do not include those trans people who ended their own lives. A 2019 [Transgender People](https://mentalhealthcommission.ca/resource/transgender-people-and-suicide-fact-sheet/) and Suicide fact sheet from the Mental Health Commission of Canada indicates that 67% of transgender people before transitioning thought about suicide, compared with 3% post transition. Compare this to the rate of 11.8% of the general population having suicidal thoughts.

It is also important to note that in more than a decade of compiling names for the International Transgender Day of Remembrance, the annual lists of those who have been murdered have overwhelmingly shown that transgender women of colour bear the particular brunt of anti-transgender violence.

The [*Injustice at Every Turn*](https://transequality.org/sites/default/files/docs/resources/NTDS_Report.pdf) survey in the US, reports manyBlack transgender people live in extreme poverty with 34 percent reporting a household income of less than $10,000/year. This is more than twice the rate for transgender people of all races, four times the general Black population rate, and over eight times the general US population.

In the upcoming silent reflection, we will see some of their names, country, and age(if known). We have intentionally not included the manner of their death, but let me just say this…All too often, when a trans person is murdered, the way they are murdered starkly reveals the hatred of the killers. They are so often dehumanized in ways too grotesque to share here today.

**There have been a total of 327** [reported](https://transrespect.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/TvT_TMM_TDoR2022_Table.pdf) **killings of trans people in 34 countries worldwide from October 1, 2021 to September 30, 2022**. 222 of these deaths have taken place in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Keeping in mind that we are each created in the image of God, I would invite us for the next few minutes to sit in thoughtful reflection as we see the images and the names of the some of the people killed this past year in the US—acknowledging there are far more than shown here. As you note their names and ages, I invite you to honour their humanity with your love and prayers and acknowledge the gift of the lives that were ended too soon because of hate, fear, and ignorance.

Tiffany Banks 25, black trans woman

Semaj Billingslea 33, black trans man

Acey Morrison, 30, Two Spirit

Mya Allen 35, black trans woman

Maddie Hofman 47, Korean trans woman

Kandii Reed, 29, black trans woman

Cherry Bush 48, homeless black trans woman

Ray Muscat, white trans man

Fern Feather 29, white trans woman

Paloma Vazquez, Latina Trans woman

To proclaim the reign of Christ means to live out Jesus’ compassion and justice, who saw the humanity in everyone and loved them, even when society considered them unworthy. This is the what the reign of Christ is, to value each persons’ dignity, regardless of age, or gender identity and to work for their full inclusion, health, and well-being so they are valued and celebrated for who they are just like everyone, all of whom are created in God’s image. May it be so.