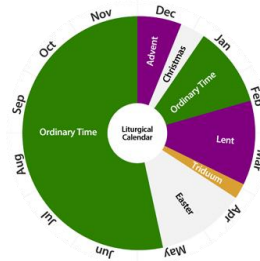


Sermon Series: Jesus
Sermon Title: King
Philippians 2:1-11

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This morning we come to the end of the Christian year.



Next Sunday, we begin a new liturgical cycle with the beginning of the season of Advent. The Christian year revolves around the life of Jesus, beginning with his promised coming and birth in the seasons of Advent and Christmas, moving toward his passion, death, and resurrection marked by the seasons of Lent and Easter, turning towards the birth of his Church at Pentecost, and then to a long reflection on the life and witness of his followers in the months following Pentecost, throughout the summer and Fall, and leading up to today when we focus on where we believe the whole thing is headed. And so today our yearlong journey through the life, death and ministry of Jesus culminates in what the Church has historically named Christ the King Sunday. And this morning's little ending of another cycle of the Christian year, points us to *the End*, the ultimate End, to what the New Testament refers to as the *eschaton*, meaning the last thing, that which is final, when things are full and complete as God intends.

Now as Christians we believe that, haphazard and chaotic as it might seem, that all of history is moving in the direction of *the End* that God imagines for the world. Not that God is dictating and rigidly controlling or predetermining each and every little event. Rather, we believe that God has a dream and purpose for God's good creation, and that despite our efforts to thwart that dream and purpose for our own selfish ends, God will one day put all things to rights. There is a good and perfect End, a day when justice shall roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever flowing stream, a day when God will wipe away every tear, and mourning and crying and pain and death will be no more, a day when God's Kingdom of righteousness, and justice, and peace will come on earth as it is in heaven. And we are to be about living toward that End. Today in the Christian year is about the God-filled moment when every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord and King *and* it's about how we live until that day comes.

Now there are a lot of ways to think about that ultimate Ending when all things will be as God intends. And one is to acknowledge that there is a sense in which that day has already come. It's

not that someday in the future Christ will be King. We know that Christ is King already, right now, today. By the power of his death and resurrection Christ is already King and Lord. He is the eternal Word of the Father and through him all creation has come into being. Christ already is seated at the right hand of the Father judging the living and the dead. Christ is Lord and King. That is true today, right now in this moment and regardless of how we feel about it. We can look to Jesus and see already the beginning of the End.

But, there is also a sense in which Christ is not yet King. It is true that Jesus has inaugurated a new Kingdom, a new way of life, it has already begun, and yet, we can look around and see that Christ's reign has not yet come in its fullness. We are waiting for it to fully unfold. We've seen glimpses of God's Kingdom in the here and now, glimpses of Christ reigning in our hearts and lives, and yet we also see countless examples of the ways in which we human beings have rejected the Lordship of Christ and allow all sorts of other things to reign over us.

And so, the question is, how do we live in this between times? How do we live having heard the truth that Christ is King, while still waiting for his reign to be fully realized? Because we can't simply sit back and say that the confession that Christ is King requires nothing of me, that's for the future. No, we have seen the healing of the world on the horizon. We've caught a glimpse of the future God intends. And because of that we are required and should want to live differently. As followers of Jesus Christ the King we are prophets who bear the word of God's truth into the world, and we are a priesthood of believers interceding on behalf of a broken dying world, all while living under the Lordship or the reign of Christ.

So, if Christ is King, not only in the *End* but also here and now, if we see in Jesus the direction God intends for all creation to be headed, then ought we not live differently today? Indeed, what might it look like for us to live as if Christ really is King? How might our lives look different if Christ is reigning in our hearts? I think now as much as ever the world needs us to be really clear in how we the Church answer this question.

And it's not an answer we have to conjure up out of the ether. The answer to what it looks like when Christ reigns in our hearts and lives is found in looking to Jesus. In him we see what life looks like for Kingdom people. Jesus teaches us that "Life in God's Kingdom, life lived under the Lordship of Christ, is not about self-aggrandizement, it's about renunciation."¹ One cue for how we are to live when Christ is King and Lord of our hearts and lives is found in today's passage from Paul's letter to the Philippians where we are reminded that Jesus is a very different kind of King reigning over a very different kind of Kingdom. In addressing the Church in Philippi Paul sees "a church distracting itself from its witness by discord, and division, and individualism

¹ Greg Garrett, *If Christ is King, What Does that Mean?*, November 20, 2011.

marked by self-serving behavior. In Paul's judgment, what the church in Philippi needs is not a scolding but a reminder of the event that created and defined their life together.

Paul urges them, "In your relationship with each other, think this way, let this be the governing attitude of the group – have the mind of Christ." (42-43) Have the mind of Christ. "...who, though he was in the form of God did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself...". (Philippians 2:5-7) Let your minds be ruled by the One humbled himself even to the point of death on a cross. Have the mind of Christ.

This beautiful passage, often referred to as the Christ hymn, reminds us of whom we are and how we are to live if Christ is Lord and King of the Church, and of our hearts, and our lives. "Life in God's Kingdom, life lived under the reign of Jesus, is not about what we have or who we are, it's about what we do. It's not about what the world values, but what God values...In other words, if we love God, if Christ is Lord and King of our lives and not merely someone to whom we give lip service and then live as we please or an escape route to get out of this world and into heaven, if our values are God-values instead of the world's values, and if Christ actually is Lord and King of our lives, then we will love as God loves, give as God gives, forgive as God forgives. If our values are God-values, we can't help but live as Christ our King taught us to live."²

You see Christianity is not so much a system of belief to which we agree and then go on living as we please because we think the right things. And therefore, our calling is to get other people to think the right things and agree with us. The Pharisees were good at that and unfortunately many have reduced following Jesus to an internal exercise of thinking the right thoughts about God. Belief does matter, but only in as much as it shapes right and holy living. The early Christians were referred to as *The Way*, that is, a people who lived life in a radically different way because Jesus and not Caesar is King. As Brian McLaren suggests, Christianity, following Jesus, is first and foremost "...a just and generous way of life, rooted in contemplation and expressed in compassion."³ Having the mind of Christ doesn't mean checking off a set of beliefs and living like the rest of the world, it means allowing Christ to reign in us and to transform us after his image, to make us citizens of his Kingdom.

Preaching in front of the Ebenezer Baptist congregation he loved, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. told the congregation (just two months before his death) how he would like to be remembered, and in doing so, he focuses our attention on how we are to live if Christ is ruler over our lives. Dr. King said, "If Christ is Lord and King of my life then my Nobel Peace Prize is less important than my trying to feed the hungry. If Christ is King, then my invitations to the White House are less important than that I visited those in prison. If Christ is Lord, then my

² Ibid.

³ Brian McLaren, *The Great Spiritual Migration*, p. 2.

being TIME magazine's "Man of the Year" is less important than that I tried to love extravagantly, dangerously, with all my being." (*I Have a Dream*, 191)

We might add to that today. If Christ is King, if Christ is Lord of my heart and life then how I treat the poor, how I well I love my neighbor (even those neighbors who are my enemies), how I faithful I am to speaking a prophetic word of truth to power, and how intentional I am at the priestly ministry of offering forgiveness and interceding on behalf of the weakest among us and those on the margins is far more important than any other allegiance, or agenda, or loyalty, or relationship we might have.

The thing about the Church when it's faithful, is that the world can look at us and know, without a doubt, that our hearts and lives belong to another. Unlike the Caesar's, the kings of this world who put Jesus to death, who use their power to control, and to secure power, and position, and wealth for themselves and their friends, Jesus willingly emptied himself and gave his life away.

In his birth, life, and death Jesus, the King, freely became a slave and a servant. On the cross, not from a golden throne, not from a palace or the halls of power, but from the cross he rules as Lord and King. Jesus' royalty was not pomp and power but humble obedience. In obedience, he set his face to Jerusalem, knowing that violence awaited him at journey's end. In obedience, he traveled along the way, eating and drinking with sinners, and remaining faithful to God's desire to gather the rejected and the lost. In obedience, he makes peace with the offering of his own life.

As Tom Long writes, "To live the Christian life is to assume the pattern of Jesus' obedience, or as Paul says, "to have the mind of Christ." To assume the pattern of Jesus' life or to have the mind of Christ means that our lives are to be defined not by grasping and clinging and substituting ourselves for God or lording over others, but by the movement of downward mobility, of letting go, of humble service. For Jesus, obedience meant carrying the cross; for us, when Christ is Lord and King of our lives obedience means denying self, taking up the cross, and following him. It means trusting in the cross and the resurrection of the God who emptied himself and became a servant." That which defines the Kingdom over which Christ reigns, is an act of humble, sacrificial, obedient service.

It is that mindset that Paul encourages us to have. People in whom Christ reigns, Jesus-followers in whom the Kingdom of God is manifest are defined by their willingness to give, to serve, to forgive, and by the humble offering of their lives in obedience to God without any promise for reward.

Our tendency is to seek security and safety over faithfulness to the gospel. But today, Jesus says to us, "let go". "If you want to be my disciple let go of the semblance of control you think you have over your life and give your life to me. If you want to follow me stop clinging to things that

cannot satisfy and cannot save you. If you want to have a real life,” Jesus says, “a life worth living, a life of freedom and joy, let go of your old life, let me reign in your heart and life and I’ll make more of your life than you could ever imagine.”

Let us pray. Lord Jesus Christ, you alone are Lord and King. Teach us good Lord, to serve you as you deserve; to give and not to count the cost; to fight and not to heed the wounds; to toil and not to seek for rest; to labor and not to ask for any reward, except that of knowing that we do your will and are citizens of your Kingdom. Amen.