

November 26, 2023  
Christ the King Sunday

Prelude

Welcome and Announcements

\*Call to Worship Revelation 22:13

The Lord is a great God who says,  
“I am the Alpha and Omega,  
**the first and the last,  
the beginning and the end.”**

\*Hymn 268 Crown Him with Many Crowns

Prayer of Confession

**Almighty and everlasting God,  
whose will it is to restore all things  
to your well-beloved Son, our Lord and King,  
grant that the people of earth, including ourselves,  
now divided and enslaved by sin,  
may be freed and brought together  
under his gentle and loving rule,  
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,  
One God, now and forever. Amen.**

\*Hymn 698 Take, O Take Me As I Am

Assurance of Forgiveness

The Lord's mercies never end. They are new every morning and sure as the sunrise.  
Friends, believe the good news of the gospel. Your sins are forgotten. Be at peace.

First Reading Psalm 150

Time With Our Young Disciples

Scripture Reading Matthew 25:31-46

The Morning Message

I have two questions for us to consider today:

1. Do you choose to live in the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ...or not?
2. How can you make your choice real?

I confess that this is not an original idea, but one I heard during a presbytery meeting.

I ask these questions, because, we have come to the end of the liturgical year, the very last Sunday. Advent, preparing for the birth of Christ, begins next week. As we move through the months, we meet Jesus at the mileposts of his life- his birth, life, ministry, death, resurrection, ascension. Then comes Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit descended upon the early believers and the Church was established. Kingdomtide, or Ordinary Time, follows Pentecost and brings us to today. When we get to this Sunday, Christ the King, or Reign of Christ, we are called on to consider the year we've traveled, how we have related to Christ, and how we have exhibited his kingdom on earth.

Christ the King Sunday also makes us stop to consider our concept of time. The time is surely coming for Christ's second Advent, though we do not know the day or the hour. But we do know this: time moves forward and our time on earth is finite. We have experienced that in painful ways this year.

Christ the King Sunday may mark the end of the church year, but it does not mark the end of our challenges. The war in Ukraine continues, the mayhem in Israel/Palestine rages, and their people suffer new atrocities daily. The news from Charleston and Washington doesn't always inspire confidence. Every trip to the grocery store gets more and more expensive. There is need all around us.

But, there is good news. While the past three holiday seasons have come with warnings about travel and the dangers of large gatherings, we aren't hearing that so much now. The Harklesses are happy. We saw two out of four for Thanksgiving. It's like filling up at the emotional fuel station. And we need that. Like many of you, our family has had some challenges this year. That word that strikes terror in all of us, cancer, struck us this year, too. We are reminded of how fragile life is and that death is inevitable.

There is nothing like being in the embrace of your loved ones to be reminded that through it all we are family and love is our creed.

So, here we are. Christ the King Sunday, the feast day that celebrates the fact that, earthly rulers come and go, and even at the height of their power, they only rule over a very small part of the created universe. Their reign is time-sensitive. It will end. But, Jesus' reign is eternal and cosmic

in its proportions. His platform doesn't change and there are no maps to tell us who is and who isn't in Jesus' district. We all are.

Jesus' realm is founded on the principals of justice and integrity-where those who live according to the values of the Kingdom will feel at home- and those who do not will find it an alien place. Christ knows us, all of us, no matter our circumstances. And Christ knows that how we live our lives, day in and day out, shows what kind of person we are.

In this text, Jesus identifies people based on their actions, how they live out their days on this earth. Those who do the tasks of Kingdom living-feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and imprisoned are acting as though they are ministering to Jesus himself. This shouldn't have been earth-shaking news. This is what they had witnessed Jesus himself doing.

Jesus also said that when they, or we, refuse to help a person in need, we are refusing him. This was a surprise, too, but, it shouldn't have been.

Jesus was teaching, or re-teaching-a fundamental rule of kingdom-living: We are the body of Christ. We are united with him- in life, death, and resurrection. What we do, one for another, builds up, enriches, and heals the body. What we fail to do, when we fail to serve as Christ serves, weakens and diminishes the body.

Jesus is a king unlike any ruler of this earth. For which we can truly thank God. Jesus is not a despot who orders his subjects to be at his beck and call. A tyrant who wields insults and inflicts pain to intimidate and control. Nor does he abandon or betray his people. Ever.

No. Jesus, is the king who throws open the doors of his dwelling-place and invites us all in. Jesus welcomes us into the fullness of his life. A life that could compel the friends of a paralyzed man to cut a hole in the roof of a house so he can be lowered into Jesus' presence. To follow Jesus is to sign up for a life of spiritual adventure.

Christ the King Sunday asks us if we will choose kingdom-living in the year ahead? It asks how will we use the gift and limits of time?

This time question has created a sense of urgency for me. A few days ago I learned that a friend of long-standing has been diagnosed with dementia. At a time in life that most of us expect to be enjoying retirement, playing with our grandkids, maybe taking that dreamed-about vacation. This husband, father and grandfather is losing his memory and losing touch with reality. Instead of more time together, this couple is separated. They don't live together at this point. This is for his safety and security, and his family's peace of mind. They are devastated. He has some precious grandkids but I don't know if he is even aware.

All this makes me very sad but it prompts me to do whatever I can to be present in the lives of my loved ones for as long as possible...to share moments special and mundane...to make memories, to celebrate milestones...to comfort one another when life turns hard, and it will.

What were your highs and lows this year? How did you cope with the lows? How did that affect your faith?

Are there changes you want to make in your life? What steps are you taking toward that?

What can you do for others, to advance the kingdom?

How will you use your time?

Will you know the joy of a peaceful heart, deep peace that comes from God?

I think we know how 2023 ends. What we don't know is what the future holds. But we know who holds the future. And we know who holds our hand.

*\*Wellspring of the Gospel*

\*Hymn 802 The King of Love My Shepherd Is, verses 1-3

\*Affirmation of Faith The Apostles' Creed p.35

\*Hymn 581 Gloria Patri

Sharing Our Joys and Concerns

The Sacrament of Communion

Great Prayer of Thanksgiving and the Lord's Prayer

O God, the first and the last, our beginning and our ending, hear our prayers on this Christ the King Sunday.

**Remind us that our true citizenship is in your kingdom and empower us to seek your love, justice, and mercy in all we do and say.**

Grant us courage to speak out against any hatred, prejudice, or abuse of power that seeks to harm others.

**Inspire us to work toward a fuller image of your kingdom here on earth, where all are treated with respect, where none go without life's basic necessities, and people of all races, religions, and circumstances are welcomed and valued.**

As we review these last days of the church year, may our good intentions be blessed and may we be granted grace where we failed.

**We pray for those who are need of healing and wholeness this day, those in our fellowship of faith, and those we name in our hearts. (pause)**

As the days turn colder and darker and winter illnesses threaten, strengthen us to persevere. While we certainly miss our departed loved ones in this season, comfort us with your presence and remind us that we are all members of the Communion of Saints, past, present, and future. We pray in Jesus' name and for his sake, saying, **Our Father...Amen.**

Distribution of the Elements

Prayer After Communion

**Blessed are you, O God, Maker of all things, through your goodness you have blessed us with these divine gifts of loaf and cup, and the gifts of ourselves- our time, our skills, and our possessions. Strengthened by this holy meal, use us and what we have gathered, in feeding the world with love, all to the glory of your name. Amen.**

Presenting Our Gifts of Tithe and Offering

Offertory

\*Hymn 607 Doxology

\*Prayer of Dedication

**God, our Alpha and Omega, for all gifts, seen and unseen, and for all the hours and days of the year completed and the one yet to be born, we give you thanks and wait for the blessing of each new dawn, rising in resurrection power. In Jesus' name and for his kingdom. Amen.**

\*Hymn 802 The King of Love My Shepherd Is, verses 4-6

\*Blessing

Through every season of every year,  
may God's blessing be upon you  
that you may be strengthened to do your part  
in advancing Christ's Kingdom. Amen.

\*Postlude