

Worship for Nov. 24, 2024
Christ the King Sunday
A Service of Thanksgiving including the Sacrament of Communion

Prelude

Welcome and Announcements

*Call to Worship Psalm 100

Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth.

Worship the Lord with gladness.

Come into God's presence with a song.

Enter God's gates with thanksgiving and God's courts with praise.

Give thanks to God, bless God's name.

**For the Lord is good. God's steadfast love endures forever;
and God's faithfulness is sure to all generations.**

*Hymn 336 We Gather Together to Ask the Lord's Blessing

Litany of Thanksgiving

For the beauty and wonder of your creation, in earth and sky and sea.

We thank you, Lord.

For all that is gracious in the lives of people, revealing the image of Christ.

We thank you, Lord.

For our daily food and drink.

We thank you, Lord.

For minds to think, and hearts to love, and hands to serve.

We thank you, Lord.

For health and strength to work, and leisure to rest and play.

We thank you, Lord.

For the brave and courageous, who are patient in suffering and faithful in adversity.

We thank you, Lord.

For all valiant seekers after truth, liberty, and peace.

We thank you, Lord.

For the communion of saints, in all times and places.

**We thank you, Lord, and give you thanks for the great mercies and promises given to us in
Christ Jesus our Lord.**

To him be praise and glory, with you and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. **Amen.**

Prayer of Confession

Holy and merciful God, in your presence we confess our failure to be what you created us to be.

**You alone know how often we have sinned
in wandering from your ways,
in wasting your gifts,
in forgetting your love.**

**By your loving mercy, help us to live in your light
and abide in your ways,
for the sake of Jesus Christ, our Savior. Amen.**

Assurance of Pardon

The grace of God overflows for us through Jesus Christ who came into the world to save sinners. In God's mercy, we have been forgiven. Alleluia! Amen.

Hymn 698 Take, O Take Me As I Am

First Reading Deuteronomy 8:1-18

Time With Our Young Disciples

Gospel Reading Luke 12:13-21

Morning Message

I have two questions for us to consider today. I raise them every year on Christ the King Sunday:

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 celebrate Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter- meeting Jesus at the mileposts of his life- his birth, ministry, death, resurrection. Then comes Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit descended upon the early believers and the Church was established. Kingdome, 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 through the deaths of friends and loved ones. I lost my first and best friend, my cousin, Melody. Many of you have endured a similar loss.

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. Last weekend we saw one of our daughters; families and got to hug three out of four grandchildren. Yesterday our daughter Caroline texted me to ask when I could facetime our grandson, Tad, who is asking questions about Christmas and Hannukah. For me, it's like filling up at the emotional fuel station. And I needed that. Like many of you, our family has had some challenges this year. That 6-letter word that strikes terror in all of us, cancer, struck us this year, too. We are reminded of how fragile and uncertain life is.

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. Even if the visit is a brief one and the highlight is witnessing the delight of a two year-old feeding baby goats.

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, reveals 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 we will use the gift and limits of time.

This time question has created a sense of urgency for me. Not long 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. He has no memory of the many accomplishments of his life and work that improved the lives of those who came seeking his counsel.

Instead of more time together, he and his good wife are separated. Not by choice. 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.

Yesterday the women in our family celebrated the upcoming 60th birthday of one our cousins, Kim. It was a grand time altogether. She is the sister to my cousin who died earlier this year. The last time we were together, there were tears and overwhelming sadness. Yesterday was filled with laughter and gratitude and a lot of food. Kim asked for donations for organizations helping the homeless in our community instead of gifts for herself. The results were 20 blankets, socks,

hats, gloves, snacks, thermal underwear, emergency tents, and emergency blankets. From 8 women. That's some pretty good Jesus math.

What were your highs and lows this year? Did you acknowledge God in the high moments? 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? Does someone you love need your help in taking steps toward a better life?

What can you do 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 2024 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 643 Now Thank We All Our God

*Affirmation of Faith The Apostles' Creed p. 35

*Hymn 581 Gloria Patri

Sharing Our Joys and Concerns

The Sacrament of Communion

Words of Institution~Invitation~Great Prayer of Thanksgiving including the Lord's Prayer

Communion of the People

The elements will be served by intinction. Please come to the Table to receive the elements. If you prefer, you may be served in the pew.

Prayer After Communion

God of abundance, with this bread of life and cup of salvation you have united us with Christ, making us one with all your people.

Now send us forth in the power of your Spirit

that we may proclaim your redeeming love to the world and continue forever in the risen life of Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

Presenting our Tithes and Offerings

Offertory

*Hymn 607 Doxology

*Prayer of Dedication

Gracious, God, your gifts are unending. The smallest of seeds can produce great blessing. With thankful hearts, we offer our gifts and our lives to you that they may bring hope and promise to a world in need. In Jesus' name and for his realm. Amen.

*Hymn 366 Love Divine, All Loves Excelling

*Blessing John F. Kennedy

On this day, let us gather in sanctuaries dedicated to worship and homes blessed by family affection, to express our gratitude for the glorious gifts of God; and let us earnestly and humbly pray that he will continue to guide and sustain us in the great unfinished tasks of achieving peace, justice, and understanding among all men and nations, and ending misery and suffering wherever they exist.

Go now in peace, to love and serve the Lord. **Amen.**

*Postlude