

## THE LAST WORD

11/25/18 ~ St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, Encinitas, CA

Christ the King (B): 2 Samuel 23:1-7; Psalm 132:1-13 (14-19); Revelation 1:4b-8; John 18:33-37

"These are the last words of David." That's how our reading from 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel begins, which got me to thinking about last words; more specifically having the last word. Now I'm sure none of you feel this way, but I'll 'fess up right now; there are times when I relish having the last word. Or at least I dream about what it would have been like to have the last word.

You know...when you're in the middle of a heated argument and somehow it has to end—plus you really want it to end; you need it to end. But maybe some of you, like me, also want to be sure that your point is the one that really sinks in; so you keep talking because you want that last word.

Well, as it turns out, I'm not the only one who thinks about this. If you Google "last word quotes", you'll find hundreds of them. There were some very helpful pieces of advice such as: "The best way to have the last word is apologize." Now, that makes a lot of sense, if you're goal is building stronger relationships (as it should be), but I have to admit the quote I liked the best was: "I always have the last word. It's just that sometimes I wait until you're so far away, you can't hear it."

Those words—that is the last words—influence the activities that will follow in the future. That's why the advice of one psychologist is: "Have the maturity to know sometimes silence is more powerful than having the last word"! Those final words influence the next chapter of our lives.

Which is where we are today. In terms of the church calendar, we are closing the final chapter of this church year and getting ready to move onto the cycle of liturgies. The church year, as many of you remember, begins next week with the first Sunday of Advent. So, it's very fitting...I suppose, intentional...that our readings this morning focus on delivering the last word.

As I already mentioned, the passage from 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel makes it clear this is what's happening, proclaiming: "These are the last words of David," and then the people are led forward into the next chapter, as the author imagines for them what the next king will be like; what kind of ruler will lead others into the kingdom of God; as well as envisions for whom and for what this ruler will stand.

Similarly, the Book of Revelation explores the last word in a metaphorical sense, reminding listeners that God is both the Alpha and the Omega—the beginning and the ending. Implying the eternity of God. The last word there is that God existed before time began and will exist still well after time ends.

In the Gospel reading, Pilate and Jesus are essentially vying for the last word, with Jesus being one who values silence over actually having the last word. But I think Jesus does that for a few different reasons. One, he is definitely among that elite group of self-controlled individuals who wisely opts for the maturity of silence; but, two, he really does want everyone to understand this mystery he is trying to relate to others; and, three—at least from my perspective—there seems to be an indication through Pilate's willingness to engage in the verbal volleyball exchange with Jesus, that he is curious about this guy called Jesus.

In fact, following the passage that was read this morning, Pilate asks: “What is truth?” in an attempt to keep the dialogue going. However, despite his interest, Pilate has a job to do; he has a reputation to uphold—not to mention an obligation to maintain the status quo. Ultimately, he takes action on that.

The encounter between Jesus and Pilate reminded me a bit of the sentencing of the arsonist I attended. In delivering the actual sentence, the judge explained her legal obligations and her commitment to justice for all those involved. After she announced Tyler’s sentence, however, the judge took the discussion into another dimension.

She spoke of the higher purpose of being in custody; that she hoped Tyler would claim for himself that this would be a turning point in his life, when he would begin to make positive choices for himself and those around him. And that he would take full advantage of the programs available to him while in prison.

In both courtrooms—the one in which Pilate presided, and the one in San Diego—there was an obligation to deal with the practicality of what was going on here in this human plane. But Jesus, and this judge, point out that there’s another dimension to consider.

I’m not a physicist, so I don’t know a lot about two-dimensional planes; to be honest, I’m not even sure if that would be a physicist or a mathematician, or something else, but I do remember my geometry classes. And when I think of the dimensions involved in God’s kin-dom, I think of lines, rays, line segments, and intersecting lines. Do you remember this stuff?

A line segment has a finite point at each end. A ray has a finite point at one end and an arrow at the other to indicate movement into infinity. A line has arrows at both ends, and, of course, intersecting lines cross paths at some point. The kin-dom of God, like a cross, is a vertical line from heaven and earth, and the horizontal line is across the entire planet...God’s love being enacted from person-to-person-to-person.

On this day, often referred to as Christ the King day, but just as often called “The Reign of Christ”, we remember that Christ’s last word is the form of the resurrection, or that life conquers death. At the same time, we celebrate the mystery of God’s eternity—that there is no beginning nor ending point in either direction. God’s kin-dom knows no bounds. Or as it is written in the book of Revelation, our God is the one “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.”

Which is what Jesus is also implying in his conversation with Pilate—that Pilate may want to talk about what title Jesus claims, etc., but that those things are of this earthly plane, and what Jesus is getting at—what people would really become aware of if they really understood what’s going on—is of the divine plane.

At the same time, however, Jesus’ consistent message is that God doesn’t operate in a one-dimensional plane. It’s not just divine or human—especially since we realize heaven is most likely not a specific place that we can point to; rather the horizontal plane involves us and must not be left out of the equation.

That’s where Jesus will come into the picture as we revisit his birth in the coming month. God incarnate; God among humans; Jesus passing on his earthly ministry to us, his disciples; insisting that we serve as the hands, feet and face of God in this plane.

So here we are at another intersection. We've just celebrated Thanksgiving and expressed our gratitude for our many blessings, and we're about to head into Advent...into the next chapter. I wonder then, what will have the last word in this chapter of your life?

A theologian's post I read yesterday suggested this is the perfect time to review the past year, asking ourselves: who has had the reigning role in my life? "Whom have I served, through my words, thoughts, and deeds? To whom have I paid allegiance? Who sits on the throne of my heart?", concentrating on the vertical axis.

But because we're so close to Thanksgiving, we can't forget that horizontal axis. From that place, we acknowledge all the ways that we receive support from our friends and family; from this church; through the bounty of our faith made flesh.

Either way, this day—this celebration of the Reign of Christ—is an opportunity to choose Christ again, and let Christ choose us. With that, I'll leave you with one more quote. This one's by theologian Rob Bell, who wrote: "No one has the last word other than God." And that, my friends, is VERY good news to all of us!

-AMEN

### **The Collect**

Almighty and everlasting God, whose will it is to restore all things in your well-beloved Son, the King of kings and Lord of lords: Mercifully grant that the peoples of the earth, divided and enslaved by sin, may be freed and brought together under his most gracious rule; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

### **2 Samuel 23:1-7**

These are the last words of David: The oracle of David, son of Jesse, the oracle of the man whom God exalted, the anointed of the God of Jacob, the favorite of the Strong One of Israel: The spirit of the LORD speaks through me, his word is upon my tongue.

The God of Israel has spoken, the Rock of Israel has said to me: One who rules over people justly, ruling in the fear of God, is like the light of morning, like the sun rising on a cloudless morning, gleaming from the rain on the grassy land. Is not my house like this with God? For he has made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and secure.

Will he not cause to prosper all my help and my desire? But the godless are all like thorns that are thrown away; for they cannot be picked up with the hand; to touch them one uses an iron bar or the shaft of a spear. And they are entirely consumed in fire on the spot.

**Psalm 132:1-13 (14-19)**

- 1 LORD, remember David, \*  
and all the hardships he endured;
- 2 How he swore an oath to the LORD \*  
and vowed a vow to the Mighty One of Jacob:
- 3 "I will not come under the roof of my house," \*  
nor climb up into my bed;
- 4 I will not allow my eyes to sleep, \*  
nor let my eyelids slumber;
- 5 Until I find a place for the LORD, \*  
a dwelling for the Mighty One of Jacob."
- 6 "The ark! We heard it was in Ephratah; \*  
we found it in the fields of Jearim.
- 7 Let us go to God's dwelling place; \*  
let us fall upon our knees before his footstool."
- 8 Arise, O LORD, into your resting-place, \*  
you and the ark of your strength.
- 9 Let your priests be clothed with righteousness; \*  
let your faithful people sing with joy.
- 10 For your servant David's sake, \*  
do not turn away the face of your Anointed.
- 11 The LORD has sworn an oath to David; \*  
in truth, he will not break it:
- 12 "A son, the fruit of your body \*  
will I set upon your throne.
- 13 If your children keep my covenant  
and my testimonies that I shall teach them, \*  
their children will sit upon your throne for evermore."
- 14 [For the LORD has chosen Zion; \*  
he has desired her for his habitation:
- 15 "This shall be my resting-place for ever; \*  
here will I dwell, for I delight in her.
- 16 I will surely bless her provisions, \*  
and satisfy her poor with bread.
- 17 I will clothe her priests with salvation, \*  
and her faithful people will rejoice and sing.

18 There will I make the horn of David flourish; \*  
I have prepared a lamp for my Anointed.

19 As for his enemies, I will clothe them with shame; \*  
but as for him, his crown will shine."]

### **Revelation 1:4b-8**

Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.

To him who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood, and made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Look! He is coming with the clouds;  
every eye will see him,  
even those who pierced him;  
and on his account all the tribes of the earth will wail.

So it is to be. Amen.

"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.

### **John 18:33-37**

Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus answered, "Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?" Pilate replied, "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?" Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here." Pilate asked him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice."