

“BEING” THE REIGN OF CHRIST

11/22/20 ~ St. Andrew’s Episcopal Church, Encinitas, CA

Reign of Christ (A): ~~Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24~~; Psalm 100; Ephesians 1:15-23; Matthew 25:31-46

I wonder what it meant to the people in the Ancient Near East to have a king. And of “kingly” qualities did they dream? Throughout the Hebrew Scriptures, the Israelites are longing for a monarch who, would not only treat them fairly, but would care for them, have their backs, and help them live lives of dignity, good health and prosperity.

Most of us have no experience of living in a monarchy; our country was founded on not having a king. If you’re like me, you sort of bristle at the reference to Christ the King. And, yet, to understand the vision of Christ seated on a throne, we have to explore the concept of monarchy.

And then, as soon as we understand that the Israelites were desperate for an all-powerful king to save them from oppression, we have to remember that Jesus presented a model of leadership that turned traditional concepts of power upside down.

Jesus didn’t call the experienced and wise into leadership; he demanded the vulnerable have a voice; and invited the marginalized to share in the vision. Instead of an all-powerful savior, Jesus promised to be a collaborative, servant leader who proclaimed equality among all.

So, even though the traditional title for today is “Christ the King” Sunday, many churches, scholars and priests refer to it as “The Reign of Christ” Sunday. The “Reign of Christ” is more broad sweeping and is about a power-with kind of system, instead of a power-over ruler.

Rather than focusing on the monarch, a reign is “the period during which a sovereign rules.” In other words, the “Reign of Christ” isn’t about us waiting for a king to save us, but about us helping bring about the loving and compassionate Reign of Christ. It’s us living into who we are as part of Christ’s reign versus waiting for Christ the King to remove life’s obstacles.

Jesus isn’t interested in the accolades or the power of the position. Instead, he’s the kind of leader who’s willing to get his hands dirty; he’s right here alongside us, helping us make a difference. Remember, Jesus is also the kind of servant leader who washes the feet of his followers.

This morning’s Gospel reading finds Jesus sort of asking his followers to conduct a self-evaluation. And that can be uncomfortable, can’t it...to assess, honestly where we’ve fallen short of our goals and haven’t met the expectations of our leader?

Jesus holds exceptionally high standards for us as followers; we are too be willing to act counter-culturally, and make sacrifices for the good of the whole. But Jesus, like any great leader, also encourages his followers; he doesn’t give up on us; and he consistently expresses his gratitude, as well as his love.

So, Jesus asks the gathered people: “are you practicing these acts of kindness with others, because if you’ve helped others, you have helped me.” And like any worthwhile self-evaluation, we should be aware of our own limits, and learn to work from our strengths. When someone shows up with pneumonia, we don’t try to figure out how to cure them; we take them to a physician.

At St. Andrew’s, we’re constantly evaluating what’s ours to do. We know, for example, that there are many people in Encinitas in need of affordable housing. But we currently aren’t

equipped to provide housing. We are equipped to provide food and meals with our commercial-sized kitchen. But when we run the limits of our abilities, we refer people to other organizations, so that they are benefiting from time-tried solutions, rather than us re-inventing the wheel.

In the week to come, I invite you to contemplate where you might be more intentional about being a part of the Reign of Christ, and where you might direct someone to solutions another entity can better provide. In the process, you might hear Jesus, uplifting you through this morning's letter to the Ephesians. Hear the encouragement, the reassurance, the gratitude and the love. And/or maybe adopt today's Psalm as your part of your daily practice.

Most importantly, always remember, as the Psalmist declares: "It is God who has made us, and we are God's; we are God's people and the sheep of God's pasture." (Psalm 100:2).

-AMEN

Collect of the Day

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.

Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24

¹¹For thus says the Lord God: I myself will search for my sheep, and will seek them out. ¹²As shepherds seek out their flocks when they are among their scattered sheep, so I will seek out my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places to which they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. ¹³I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land; and I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the watercourses, and in all the inhabited parts of the land. ¹⁴I will feed them with good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel shall be their pasture; there they shall lie down in good grazing land, and they shall feed on rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. ¹⁵I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I will make them lie down, says the Lord God. ¹⁶I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, but the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them with justice. ²⁰Therefore, thus says the Lord God to them: I myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep. ²¹Because you pushed with flank and shoulder, and butted at all the weak animals with your horns until you scattered them far and wide, ²²I will save my flock, and they shall no longer be ravaged; and I will judge between sheep and sheep. ²³I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd. ²⁴And I, the Lord, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them; I, the Lord, have spoken.

Psalm 100

- 1 Be joyful in the LORD, all you lands; *
 serve the LORD with gladness
 and come before his presence with a song.
- 2 Know this: The LORD himself is God; *
 he himself has made us, and we are his;
 we are his people and the sheep of his pasture.
- 3 Enter his gates with thanksgiving;
 go into his courts with praise; *
 give thanks to him and call upon his Name.
- 4 For the LORD is good;
 his mercy is everlasting; *
 and his faithfulness endures from age to age.

Ephesians 1:15-23

¹⁵I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, and for this reason ¹⁶I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers. ¹⁷I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, ¹⁸so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, ¹⁹and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power. ²⁰God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. ²²And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, ²³which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

Matthew 25:31-46

³¹“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. ³²All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, ³³and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. ³⁴Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; ³⁵for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, ³⁶I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’ ³⁷Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? ³⁸And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? ³⁹And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ ⁴⁰And the king will answer

them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.' ⁴¹Then he will say to those at his left hand, 'You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; ⁴²for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, ⁴³I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' ⁴⁴Then they also will answer, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?' ⁴⁵Then he will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.' ⁴⁶And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."