Sermon for 22 November 2026 @ Bethesda UMC

Reign of Christ/Christ the King Sundayi

Scriptures: Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24 ; Psalter(Hymnal --page 801, Response 1) -- Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19 ; Ephesians 1:15-23; Matthew 25:31-46

Sermon

In the church of my childhood, there was a beautiful stained-glass window showing Jesus with his disciples and saying, “I am the vine, ye are the branches.”

That’s what I want to talk about today.

On this last Sunday of the 2025-26 Christian Year, we have scriptures talking about God putting David over the people of Israel as their king, in the reading from Ezekiel. That’s a big point, putting a king over Israel, after leaving them without a king and the Jews saying they wanted a king like the other countries, and not getting one, until finally God seemed to give in and choose one: first Saul, a failure, and now David, favored by God as the right and second one.

Then we have a psalm seeming to honor this move in history, praising God in the ultimate highness.

And we have a reading from Ephesians praising Jesus as the divine human presence for all people.

And finally we have the Gospel from the Book of Matthew, which has been our principal Gospel book for the past year, declaring strongly, as Matthew so often does, that Jesus’ taking care of the sick and troubled and those in all kinds of need is the key point of our very being.

Powerful scriptures, all of them.

Key points that we are never to neglect.

But along comes a particular moment, and it overtakes even the very sum of the passing year: that of our relationship to each other in serving God.

We have moved rather quickly into considering merging with another congregation: Faith United Methodist Church, just down Harford Road a few blocks. Both they and their fellow-occupants of the same building, Eastern United

Methodist Church, have been struggling with the cost of upkeep on the building they both occupy, and with your permission as a congregation I have reached out to them both and said, “Is there something we can do to help you?” Faith has been the one that eventually reached out to us with a “yes; may we share space with your building?” And as you remember, our reaction has been welcoming …. and now there’s a meeting with me and our District Superintendent, Rev. Schiechert, right after Thanksgiving, on November 30, to discuss the matter … and in the meantime, both Charles and I have had candid discussions with their pastor, Rev. Ron Dodson, that were both detailed and favorable in preparation for this time.

This is the topic that occupies me on this closing, summing-up Sunday of 2026. I ask you to ponder relationships, history, options, and to be thoughtful about what Jesus means when he likens us to a vine, with him being the total vine and our being its branches. It is a puzzling image. How can you separate a vine from its branches? Aren’t we all one plant? How fundamentally connected we are, with each other, but also with our Lord! There’s just no separation … The power of God is literally bound up with and through us, and there’s no way we don’t live and breathe God’s own nature.

I ask you to pray and think and share with one another over this, and whenever an opportunity comes to discuss it, do so, honestly, hopefully, wonderingly. I’ve had several serious chats with Rev. Dotson, and with some of you. Let us enter the new season of Advent with loving and honest thinking and talking and of course, praying.

Let us pray now. Dear Lord, this is real discipleship. It doesn’t get more practical, more down-to-earth. Help us consider both our mission and theirs, and evaluate how well we’re suited to cooperate, to serve, to grow, and to work through issues as they come up. Thanks for making this moment possible, and for reminding us that we are you and you are us, walking the earth and making it safe and fruitful. Let this new ground we’re working be your calling and bring us through the work of deciding better than we were before this came along … for we acknowledge that we are part of you, and so is our neighbor. In Christ’s name we pray, Amen.