

Sermon for 21 November 2021 @ Bethesda UMC/Baltimore  
Christ the King/Reign of Christ Sunday  
Scriptures: 2 Samuel 23:1-7; Psalm 132:1-12; Revelation 1:4b-8 ; John  
18 :35-37  
« *Everlasting* »

We pay so much more attention to the days and divisions of the so-called “Christian Year” than we used to, and I think it’s wonderful.

It all started just after I finished seminary, and the moving force, at first, was the great renewal convocation of the Roman Catholic Church launched by Pope John XXIII, now known as Vatican 2, where the mass was translated into the language of the congregation, the nuns reduced the formality of their dress, and much more Bible was used in every service of worship.

Among the changes was this last Sunday before the season of Advent, which was, and is, now known as the Festival of Christ the King, or Reign of Christ Sunday. Just as All Saints Sunday calls us to remember the hope of continuing, everlasting fellowship with God and one another, so Reign of Christ Sunday sums up the whole teaching of our faith, the whole year of our worship schedule, with the affirmation that we’re headed .... We and all creation ...towards a good and glorious completion of everything from nature to history.

Stop and breathe deeply to absorb that. Let it sink in. Learn the habit of reminding yourself of that faith whenever ANYTHING happens, and no matter when or how you wake up or what comes over your phone or where you find yourself lying down or confronting or running or even praying. It’s all OK ... even the destruction Jesus predicts and endures, and even the change that continually upsets those of us who’ve gotten used to certain things we’ve felt were worthwhile and useful to lots and lots of people and lots and lots of fish and fowl and other friends, to say nothing of the stars and cycles of the year and the price of everything compared to our pay.

All sorts of Bible verses could be used to point out this trust we base our lives on. The first one today uses David, in what many scholars think is a very old text, promising to be used by God, no matter what happens, as a sign of permanent fellowship with the people of God, namely, with Israel. Not that David’s kingdom will be in charge, as we know from all the troubles that follow David’s line, from Absalom onwards ... and not that David’s descendants will stay in power if they fail to follow God ... but that, all down into the future, a line from David will remain as a steady reminder of God’s presence with all people. The psalm echoes this with a hint of the eventual appearance of a Messiah to settle and straighten out human affairs, based on God’s reliable promise to stay among the people. The last book in the Christian Bible, Revelation, rounds this out with so many affirmations of Jesus

Christ: His faithful witness, his new life after death, his example of what lies ahead for all who persevere ... that we have no way to stop praising God's righteousness and love.

But the Gospel of John is given today, in the extended dialogue between Jesus, the prisoner of Rome, and Pontius Pilate, Rome's representative of human power, as the clincher of our confidence in the final end of all things. "My kingdom is not of this world," Jesus answers Pilate," to which Pilate replies, "So you are a king?" in a complete lack of understanding everything we're talking about as religious people.... And there we leave the matter of proof on this final day of our liturgical year.

This is not a day to fold our hands and say, "God will work it out, no matter what I do." This is not a day to stop loving either our neighbors or ourselves. This is drama of the deepest kind, because it sums up not just my affairs and yours, and not even whether there will be a United States of America or even a planet called Earth later on. What we're talking about today is the direction of all the things we have a share in. If it's at hand, if we can contribute to its life, or its betterment, or even its peaceful and constructive death, then we are called to make it better, because in God's sight, for us, it is eternal.

This is the encouragement this day offers us. We simply cannot live without being involved in useful purposes, in God's arrangement. That's what makes church so enticing: No matter what we huddle and find worth doing in Jesus' spirit, that will bear good fruit. Raising a child, weeping over a murder on the streets of Baltimore, praying for healing and health ... these things are eternally significant. Christ reigns. We stumble and wonder, and always, we find ourselves wondering, turning, waiting, trying a new direction, because we are not the final leader; but our confusion, our smallness, is only one side of you and me. There is also a certainty: We have intuition, we rise up from reflection and prayer, we find friends and teachers we can rely on... and that is the sign of Christ's reign.

Let us be silent a moment and reflect on that.

Now let us continue our worship, our assurance, our goodwill, on that foundational belief, this last Sunday of one Christian year cycle.... and in preparation for the next year of Christ's eternal reign.

In Jesus Christ's name, Amen.