

Sermon for 20 November 2022 @ Bethesda UMC/Baltimore

Reign of Christ/Christ the King Sunday

Scriptures: Jeremiah 23:1-6; Psalter: 208 ("Canticle of Zechariah" ..*Benedictus*) Luke 1:68-79;  
Luke 23:33-43

### **"Elevation, Degradation"**

Pull out your pew Bibles and turn to the Gospel lesson we read for Reformation Sunday. Find the story of Zaccheus, the tax collector. Read Jesus' answer to those who grumbled at Jesus for praising that rich tax collector for celebrating Jesus' coming to dine at his house by saying, "Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much." 'Then Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham." Now read together with me verse 10: "For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost."

We're in the wrong country to be Christians. You're supposed to get ahead here. Not just Donald Trump, with his MAGA slogan, "Make America Great Again," but our *Declaration of Independence* and our very Constitution insist on that: "For ourselves and our posterity," and "what seemeth best to us to secure for ourselves and our posterity..."

As advanced as we are among the peoples of the earth, we have a long way to go.

I listened to a seminar of top law professors on my car radio yesterday, and towards the end, the clearest agreement came to, was, "We need to have a system of government that eliminates real poverty for everyone as a basic principle, before you get to anything else."

I'm not preaching economic equality as salvation. I am saying selfishness is no substitute for justice. I'm saying we're on the verge of an advance in human development that puts equality at the center of any system of righteousness and goodness equal to our blessings and possibilities.

I'm saying the sum of any description of Jesus as Lord includes rescuing what is now being lost about us, and between us, and among us, now, that can and should be saved. I'm saying the argument about whether that fourteen-year-old squeegee kid should be tried as a juvenile or as an adult for shooting that man who came after him and his buddies with a baseball bat is not the issue. The issue is whether punishment or rehabilitation ought to be the point of incarceration, if we call ourselves a healthy society.

(Here, describe the latest developments in the split among United Methodists, including the condemnation those who are leaving have just put out criticizing the election of our first black gay married bishop, and the quote Jackson Day, who was pastor of St. John's Church just down the street from where I live, "Why are those who are getting divorced still in the bedroom?" and our own Bonnie McCubbin's reminding us that you can't pass laws in one jurisdiction that affect another jurisdiction because white Methodists didn't want Black Methodists telling them

how to behave when the North and South and Protestant Methodists came back together in 1939 after their split over the Civil War).

We are facing the greatest progress in human development of all time. Global warming and nuclear war and just plain cooperation between all the elements of nature, including us as humans among ourselves, are the aim of things, in what we should be preaching.

And you and I know sometimes that's happening, and sometimes it's not. Let us pray and work towards that, in the fellowship, and through the Spirit, of Jesus Christ, Lord of heaven and earth.

Amen.