

Now and Forever
John 18:33-37; Revelation 1:4b-8
November 25, 2018 – Christ the King Sunday

The two most important holidays of the year are Christmas and Easter. Notice, I did not say “the two most important Christian Holidays” or the “the holidays of the Christian year.” I make no distinction in this case because I believe as Christians, there is nothing more important than our faith in Jesus Christ. So I say again, the two most important holidays of the year are Christmas and Easter.

Friends, the secularization of Christmas really saddens me. I remember being in Puerto Rico over the Christmas holidays several years ago. In that tradition, Christmas is purely a sacred holiday. It’s a time of worship, singing of carols, lighting of candles. It is truly and purely a sacred time. Puerto Ricans celebrate the gift-giving, the parades, and the parties on “Three Kings Day” which we call Epiphany, twelve days after Christmas, the time when tradition tells us the Wise men arrived in Bethlehem. I like that tradition. Christmas is truly a sacred time.

It was in my very first sermon in this church that I told you the entire Old Testament, is a story of God’s constant attempt to re-established God’s relationship with humanity after the sin of Adam and Eve. At times, for short times, that relationship was established, but only to have humanity fall away again in very short order. Then came Jesus, in the person of Jesus, God said, “Okay, if you won’t come to me, I’ll come to you”; and “the Word became flesh and blood” (John 1:14) to live with us, to walk with us, to teach us, to heal us, and ultimately to die for us. That’s what we celebrate at Christmas – God taking on human form so that we might have an ever closer relationship with God.

Then comes Easter and the rest of the story. God in Christ not only died for us, but rose from the dead to a newness of life, with the promise to be with us always, (Matthew 28:20) and “always” means “always” in this life and in the life to come, everywhere we go, in everything we do, Christ is with us; and Christ will be with us when we take our last breath, and Christ will walk with us as we journey from this world into the heavenly realm. Friends, that’s the story of Easter, the promise of God in Christ with us always, the promise that death is not the end, not the end for Christ and not the end for us. The last words of John Wesley, literally on his death bed were: “Best of all. . . God is still with us.”

I’m sometimes asked why I am Christian. Why am I not Jewish or Muslim, both religions that I have studied extensively and have a great respect for. My answer is that I have a profound belief in the Trinity, in the one God: Father, Son, and Spirit. I will never forget being in a graduate level theology class and being asked if God is transcendent or immanent? Is God transcendent – the creator, who

is beyond creation; or is God immanent – actively a part of creation, working within creation. I replied, “Both.” My professor said, “You can’t have it both ways, God is either separate from creation or a part of creation.” I said, “The Holy Trinity allows me to have it both ways. I can worship a creator God who is beyond the created order; and, at the same time, worship a God who walks beside me, who supports me, who gives me strength, who gives me very real love; and that’s who the Living Christ is today.”

So today is Christ the King Sunday. It’s the final Sunday of the Christian Year. Next week we enter Advent. Why did I spend the first half of this sermon highlighting all this theology “stuff”? Because, for me, it explains who Christ is; it explains the importance of Christ in our lives.

Several years ago, I toured the United States Naval Academy at Annapolis; and I remember being in their beautiful chapel, surrounded by stained glass windows. I specifically remember one window of a midshipman being awarded his commission, and a light from heaven was shining upon him. Our tour guide explained that the window is called “The Second Commission” because, as a midshipman is given a commission by the President of the United States, they are also given a commission by God. I like the window, but I thought, “It’s misnamed.” With all due respect to our military and in all the love for our country, I tell you the commission by God should be the first commission. For a Christian, nothing comes before the call of God. (Maybe that’s why I’m a clergy person and not a naval officer.) So today, I tell you, “Christ is my king; and Christ is your king.”

In sixteenth century Europe, some bloody wars were fought in the name of religion. Catholics and Lutherans took up arms to claim religious rights over churches, monasteries, and entire communities. Then in 1555, the Peace of Augsburg was signed. It established the practice of *Cuius regio, eius religio*, Latin for “whose realm, his religion.” What the Peace of Augsburg essentially said was, “Whatever the religion of the ruler of the kingdom was; that would be the religion of the kingdom.” I thought about this, and I thought: “My king is Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the ruler of the kingdom, the realm in which I live; and I base my religion, my beliefs, and I try to base my life on the Gospel of Jesus Christ.” It’s a Gospel of faith. It’s a Gospel of hope. It’s a Gospel of peace. And, most of all, it’s a Gospel of love.

So bear with me just a bit longer as I again get theological. Just as I stated that God is both beyond creation and a part of creation, I also state that God is infinite and ultimate. God is infinite. God extends forever. There is no place that God is not. As the Psalmist says:

⁷ Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence?
⁸ If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.
⁹ If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,
¹⁰ even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast.
(Ps. 139:7-10 NRSV)

And God is ultimate. There is nothing that is greater than God. And that's what our scripture from Revelation is saying. God in Christ is the Alpha and the Omega – the first and the last, and everything in between. Christ is the one who is, and was, and is to come – present for us at all times.

So where do we go with all this? I can simplify all I said in just two statements on this Christ the King Sunday. First, Christ is always with us. Christ will lead us and guide us and support us and love us, if we simply accept his love and direction, if we simply worship is kingship, and, at the same time, welcome his friendship.

Secondly, while Jesus did say, "My kingdom is not of this world," we regularly pray, "Thy kingdom come, they will be done on earth, as it is in heaven." And so, I believe that we, as Christians are called to further Christ's kingdom on earth by our thoughts, our words, and our actions.

We have a king in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, a benevolent king, a loving king, a caring king. May we daily live in the light of his kingship and his love; for, of his kingdom there will be no end.

Let us pray. . .

Lord,
We worship you and we adore you.
Give us the faith, the courage, and the strength
to follow you, wherever you may lead;
for you are our King, our Savior, and our Lord.
Amen.