

The Reverend Marjo Anderson

B-Christ the King / Reign of Christ

Daniel 7.9-10, 13-14, Psalm 93, Revelation 1.4b-8, John 18.33-37

26 November 2023

Salem, Bridgeport

“A Different Kind of Kingdom”

It's Christ the king Sunday and I have to wonder what Jesus thinks about this day.

There were always those who held up the prospect of kingship before him – even before he began his ministry!
You remember, don't you? After his baptism, what happens?

He goes into the desert to pray and fast for 40 days

as he seeks to discern God's will for his life and work, the plan and purpose God has for him here on earth.

And at the end of the 40 days comes Satan – the one who not only offers Jesus a kingdom, but who says,

“I will give you ALL the kingdoms of the earth, if only you will bow down and worship me.”

To which Jesus exclaims,

“Away with you, Satan! For, it is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him’”.

While the gospel of John does not include the temptation stories, early in the gospel, in chapter 6, John writes,

“Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king,

Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself.”

And here, as we approach the end of the story, again Jesus is confronted with the question: Is he a king?

The question has hounded him for three years,

and no matter how many times he has made his position clear, people still don't get it.

Jesus understands, you see, that for human beings on this planet earth, there is only supposed to be one king –

only one who has ultimate power and control and to whom belongs all glory and honor,

only one who can be trusted to be just and merciful and faithful

and whose kingdom can never be destroyed and will never pass away but will be everlasting,

only one whom all people and all nations are to serve –

and that is God, the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end.

That understanding was not new – Jesus had learned it from scripture.

Our psalm today is number 93, and it's one of the so-called “enthronement psalms”,

which are grouped together in the 90s.

But what is interesting is that they come after Psalm 89,

which begins on a high note and ends with the destruction of Israel's monarchy.

And after the monarchy has been destroyed, the psalmist offers the people – in the next group of psalms –

a new vision – a vision in which it is God who is king.

What Jesus spent three years trying to get across to people was that –

even in our physical bodies in this material world –life is first and foremost a spiritual thing.

Now in our day & age, there's this myth floating out there that people need to choose between science & faith –

and that smart people will certainly choose science.

That's why many people – especially young people – have fallen away from the church.

Sunday worship rituals have no relevance for them,

they find of community in places like their local gym,

and they can provide social service through other organizations that have nothing to do with belief in God.

And those are the only things many Mainline Protestant churches offer –

ritual, community, and opportunities for social service –

all things having to do with the physical and the material.

That was also what the scribes and Pharisees offered.

But, Jesus knew and taught that the main focus cannot be organized religion on a material level, but rather the focus must be on one's spiritual connection to God.

The trouble is, although we might see a result of the spiritual in the physical world – our “God-sightings” – we can't see the spiritual with our physical eyes or hear the spiritual with our physical ears.

We can't see and hear the spiritual directly.

We can only EXPERIENCE the spiritual, when we allow the Spirit of the Living God to come in through our hearts to connect with our spirits.

That's what Jesus spent his first 30 years doing – connecting spiritually with God, getting to know God, learning to put aside his trust in himself and to trust in God, allowing God to transform his mind and heart, opening himself up to living into God's plan and purpose for his life, becoming an open channel through which God could work signs and wonders and miracles!

Jesus, you see, had no interest in taking on the powers and principalities of his day.

To do so would have required him to play their game of power and control.

That's why he said, “My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews.

But as it is, my kingdom is not from here.”

And that means that OUR kingdom – the kingdom you and I live in – cannot be from this world either.

Of course we do live in the physical world, in towns and cities and states and countries with earthly rulers.

And there are ways to live responsibly (or not) here on earth.

But even as we acknowledge the need for people to stand up and speak out for justice, e.g., we must act first from our position within God's spiritual kingdom,

not using our own power and authority to stand up against evil,

but allowing God's power and authority to work through us.

For when we attempt to act on our own initiative, out of our own desires, in our own power, we will simply be acting as physical beings in a material world.

When, however, we follow God's call – which may actually go against our own desires and self-interest! – and we allow God to work through us, then we are doing what Jesus did.

And that's the point of our lessons today.

It's not just a history lesson about how Jesus ended up being killed.

It's a story that tells us the truth of how God's power is meant to work in and through us.

Jesus acted as he did, not just to accomplish God's will in his own life, but to model for us how we are to act.

While he was here on earth, the human Jesus understood

that the only one who had authority over his life was God.

And allowing God's power and authority to have sway in his own life,

meant allowing himself to be abandoned, betrayed, condemned, and killed.

But his trust in God's boundless power and endless love was rewarded when God raised him from the dead, and when he returned to reign with God as Christ the King for all eternity.

But the important part for us is not simply that Christ is king,

but that we have been invited to live in his kingdom, as priests – as people set aside – to be servants of God.

And that last part is key. Our primary role is not to serve others, but to serve God.

That's what Jesus knew & understood & that's what Jesus kept trying to get across to everyone.

He wasn't here for the primary purpose of serving people; he was here to serve God and God alone.

And, of course, as Jesus served God, God used Jesus to serve others.

And as we serve God, God will use us to serve others.

But just as I preached last week about the order of Micah 6:8 being crucial – justice first, mercy second – here the order is important:

Jesus came to serve God who was Lord of all.

And Jesus came to instruct us to do the same.

On this Christ the King Sunday, I'd like to leave you with a few questions...

How much time to you spend in God's presence -waiting on God?

How much time do you spend praising God and thanking God?

How much time do you spend listening to God

through scripture, through others, through events, and through other means?

How much effort do you spend discerning what it is that God wants you to do in the immediate and the distant future?

How much of your serving arises not simply from your own desires, but from a conviction that this is what God has called you to do?

On this Christ the king Sunday,

we are reminded that we are not only physical but spiritual beings, and while we live in a material world,

there is a spiritual world in which God reigns supreme.

We can spend our lives living only in this material world,

or we can invite God in to connect with our spirits, to be the Lord of our lives.

When we do that – when we put aside our own needs and desires,

our own limitations and self-centeredness, our own power and control – and bow before the Lord our maker, before Christ the King,

before the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning in the end,

then not only will we find abundant life for ourselves in God's kingdom,

but God will be able to work through us to do what we cannot do on our own –

to bring light into the darkness, peace into situations of conflict,

justice to the oppressed, hope to the despairing, healing to the hurting,

joy to the sorrowful, and love to the lonely.

We cannot solve the problems in our personal lives,

or in our church, or our towns and cities, or state, or country, or world by human power.

But when we recognize Christ as king, and lay down our own power and authority

in order to step into the kingdom where Christ's power and authority reigns,

that's when the world will begin to change.

When we pray the Lord's Prayer in just a few moments,

I ask you to think about the words anew through the lens of Christ the King.

"...Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done....

For thine is the kingdom and the power and glory forever. Amen"