

“The Reign of Christ”

Sermon by Lisa Crismore

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Revelation 1:4b-8 Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.

To him who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood, and made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever, Amen.

Look! He is coming with the clouds; every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and on his account all the tribes of the earth will wail. So it is to be. Amen.

“I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.

Who likes to receive letters? If you are like me, when the mail comes, I sift through all the junk mail looking for the bills and hoping to find a card or a letter, handwritten by a friend or loved one. These letters that are filled with joy and love. I know when people here at the church have been sick they will put a thank you note in the newsletter thanking people for their visits, prayers, calls and cards or letters. Last week, I was listening to a conference online with my dear friend, Sarah Sedgwick. She has a fourteen-month-old step granddaughter, who she dearly loves. She showed me a video of her carrying around some envelopes and trying to open one. Even, little Amelia has learned how important letters are to receive.

Today, we find ourselves celebrating Christ the King Sunday and the lectionary taking us to the last book of the Bible, Revelation. Some people stay clear of this book because of its apocalyptic vision, giving us insight or revealing into the future of Jesus second coming and heaven. Actually, apocalypse in Greek means revelation. It is like peeling back and revealing something. Revelation is actually a letter sent to the seven Asian Christian congregations near Ephesus. Just like the Apostle Paul used letters to communicate to the churches so does the author of this letter, who many believe (but not all scholars agree) to be the Apostle John.

John is writing to give hope to the churches, who are a community faced with violence and persecution. It is not clear if their troubled distress call, which has reached John, is a local matter or something that has been inflicted by the Roman empire. But whatever it is, John is wanting to send a message to them from God telling them that Jesus loves them, and he will have dominion over them forever.

The former pastor of the House for All Sinners and Saints in Denver, Colorado, Pastor Nadia BolzWeber, described this genre of literatures like this: “Originally... apocalyptic literature — the kind that was popular around the time of Jesus — existed not to scare the bejeezus out of children so they would be good boys and girls, but to proclaim a big, hope-filled idea: that dominant powers are not ultimate powers. Empires fall. Tyrants fade. Systems die. God is still around.”
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=olgaS6Pydc0>)

These letters must have been a ray of light as the churches opened and read them. These words had been sent from someone dear to them and who greeted them with grace to you and peace. The letter goes right into who is the real messenger – “the one who is, who was and who is to come.”

John uses the letter to remind and teach who is this Jesus. This man, who was fully human and fully God was a faithful witness, teaching about love, forgiveness, serving others, seeking justice for the least of these and healing the sick. He is the firstborn from the dead. He had victory over death on Easter morning and he declares that we will receive this same gift through him. Jesus is

the ruler over the kings of the earth. He has power over all of creation including humans and yet lets us have free will to make our own choices.

John uses the letter to remind and teach what has Jesus done. He saved us from our sins so that we are not chained down but free. On Good Friday, we read and witness the blood and horror that he bared on the cross. He made us to be a kingdom, gathering in community and forming relationships with each other and with Christ.

In this, John uses the letter to remind and teach us that as members of the kingdom what our work is under Christ's reign. How many of you are ministers? Actually you all ministers or priests of God. As we are created to be in relationships, we learn how we are called to be priests or ministers for each other. Just like Christ is the faithful priest for God his Father, we are called to faithfully serve.

That is a pretty tall order and expectation when it comes to serving Jesus as Christ the King. The scripture goes on to say that Christ has dominion over everything forever. Our promise is that Christ will be with us forever – even when we are challenged, even when our world is turned upside down, even when we are feeling overwhelmed; even when we are wandering in the desert and there is no water in sight; even in death. Christ is with us forever!

Why do we celebrate Christ the King Sunday on this last Sunday of our Christian calendar? This past week, I like you have had some disturbing news. Our city of Indianapolis hit the highest number of homicides in our history. We have had 219 people murdered this year. Some of them were killed just miles away from our church. We as Christians question how we can make a difference and be Christ's presence for our community.

And our Covid numbers are going up. It appears that there is this every two-month surge of this virus that seems to continue to plague us. This is alarming as we go into the holiday season knowing that people will be visiting loved ones and connecting with friends more frequently. We fear that there may be a breakthrough even though the majority of us have been vaccinated.

We hear reports from Afghanistan that their banking system is collapsing, and people are not getting pay checks. Without money, they cannot buy food. People are starving and they fear a national famine especially for women and children.

This is all very overwhelming news but the personal question that struck me the most this week was, "How do I know that I am going to heaven when I die? How do I know?" This is a question I believe we have all asked at some point in our lives. I remember this was the same question my husband's grandfather started asking when he hit 100 years old. He lived to be 103.

The simple answer is this "Jesus loves me and you." All of the world's problems and our own can be so overwhelming. And yet, we can hold onto to Jesus loving us. Jesus loved us so much that he died for us, shedding his blood for the cleansing of the world. Jesus loves us so much that he has resurrection power and passed it onto us. Jesus loves us. If this is true and we can BELIEVE and have a smidgen of FAITH, then nothing else really matters. Jesus loves us. We have to live out that love, passing that love onto others even our enemies. Jesus loves us. Jesus never leaves us and that gives us hope! Jesus loves us and he will come again!

Prayer by Peter M. Wallace: O Holy Christ, you are not a tyrant; you are a lover. Jesus, you are not a power mad despot we are forced to serve or else, You are a servant witness. And you call us to be the same sort of loving and serving witnesses to others. When we grasp that calling, our lives become sources and avenues of praise for "the Alpha and the Omega, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty. Amen.