

St. David's Presbyterian Church
St. John's, NL
"Thy Kingdom Come"
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Christ the King

The worldwide movement that we are a part of, starting back around two thousand years ago has always been and always will be a counter-cultural movement. Now some could argue that there have been times when Christianity was the official religion of an empire, such as Constantine's, or other past empires in Europe. Some could even argue that Christianity is the mainstream religion in both the United States and Canada today; well, at least in the 1950s and 1960s.

Today, the Judeo-Christian values of those eras are pretty much all being challenged. And once again, Christianity is becoming, if not already is, a counter-cultural religion. This means it will not be easy to serve Christ, to speak of Christ, to speak of one's personal faith, because the cultural response might be, "I can't believe you go to church." Or, "I can't believe you believe in that religion that has hurt so many people throughout history and caused numerous wars."

My many years in Religious Studies at various universities in California and across Canada have exposed me to such comments. It seems the time we live in is a time where most religions enjoy a freedom of expression and even invitation to conversion that Christianity simply does not enjoy. Countless times I've seen this happen in at least in the '70s, '80s, and '90s. And by the way, if you know what we are supposed to call the decade in which are currently in, before we live it behind in a few days, please tell me. Is it the '00s? Or is it the noughts?

So if it is true that we are back to a default counter-cultural expression of faith, what does this mean for each of us personally? It means that once again we need to focus on the founder of our faith, our relationship to Him and the reason why we believe. When we consider Jesus, then we come back to the core of why we are here.

Twice a year we are encouraged by the Lectionary makers to consider Jesus Christ, the King. He is Kings of Kings and Lord of Lords. These two times are Christ the King Sunday, or as they now call it, the Reign of Christ, de-emphasizing the King's office and de-emphasizing the male terminology.

The second time is at Ascension which follows the seven weeks of the Easter season. Today we are at the end of what is called "ordinary" time. It is the longest season in the Lectionary and church calendar. It stretches from the week after Pentecost until the week before Advent. This is partly why I have been campaigning for a Thanksgiving Season inside this Ordinary Time, at least from Canadian Thanksgiving until American Thanksgiving. It also signals, if you haven't noticed in the malls and shopping institutions, that we are embarking on that season of Advent and Christmas starting next week.

And there is the place we will start being challenged to ask ourselves what we believe about Christmas and how we celebrate the season. Every tradition surrounding Christmas can be linked back to Jesus, so that he can once again be the King of this season. Every light we put up, every decoration, every candy cane, every wreath, can lead us back to the One to whom we say at least every week, "Thy Kingdom Come." Even the Santa Claus legends should direct us back to St. Nicholas the bishop who gave to the poor, and learned anew what the Scriptures say, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

Many of us no longer find it a blessing to give, because we have set ourselves impossible tasks in buying gifts and sending cards for dozens, if not hundreds of people. And so some people dread the time coming. Others have lost loved ones at this time of year, and those memories haunt them. But if we can take a moment and bow the knee before the King Jesus, perhaps he will give us a reprieve from our self-made prisons of busy-ness and shopping in this coming season. And I so I pray, "Lord Jesus, deliver us from that which leads us away from you, even as the season should be dedicated to you."

When Pilate found out that Jesus did say he was a king, he seized the moment and said, "So you are a king?" in John 18. Jesus answered that that was indeed the reason he was born, but he also noted that his kingdom wasn't the kind that people were supposed to take up guns and weapons to defend. It was a new movement, and the hallmark of that movement was and is truth. Listen to what Jesus says in John 18:37, "Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice." So take the moment, and before you go crazy in this season, remember this is the transformational moment that all of us need to take. I know I need to take that moment, a moment of

prayer, a moment of reading the Scriptures, a moment of reading a book about my faith. These moments are the spiritual disciplines that I struggle to do on a year round basis. How is it, then, that we would struggle even more with these disciplines during the season which is devoted to Christ, and his coming and birth?

Don't hear condemnation. Hear an opportunity. Listen to what Jesus is saying to you. Take the time to breathe, relax and listen to his voice, his love, his knowing history from a to z, alpha to omega, beginning and end. A time will come when everyone will see him, that's what Revelation tells us. Meanwhile, it's our time to listen. And as we hear the descriptions of God, as told in Daniel 7, we worship God:

7:9 As I watched, thrones were set in place, and an Ancient One took his throne, his clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was fiery flames, and its wheels were burning fire.

7:10 A stream of fire issued and flowed out from his presence. A thousand thousands served him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood attending him. The court sat in judgment, and the books were opened.

7:13 As I watched in the night visions, I saw one like a human being coming with the clouds of heaven. And he came to the Ancient One and was presented before him.

7:14 To him was given dominion and glory and kingship, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, and his kingship is one that shall never be destroyed.

These are pictures of the Ancient One who is the Father and the king, who is the Son. These are re-assurances that there will be true justice in the end from the One who knows all the hidden facts. These are re-assurances that everyone will give an account to a higher power than themselves, politicians, world leaders, local leaders, doctors, lawyers, religious leaders, mayors, counselors, professors, factory workers, everyone will get a chance to sit down with God. And at that time, we will be asked about our relationship to the King. How did we spend our lives? Did we know how important that key relationship in history actually is?

And we will not only talk about that relationship, but all our other relationships, because time will be no more, and every argument will be followed to an absolute conclusion. Are you ready for that time? Are you looking forward to it?

I believe that time will be the ultimate time of Thanksgiving. Because we will see, whether we want to or not, that all our life was a gift from above.

And can I just take a moment and thank God for my wife and my daughters. I need to say how proud I am for how they follow God, and take seriously the call to live their lives in the light of Jesus Christ. No, they are not perfect in this task. They ask questions, and search hard for the answers. They struggle with relationships and learning just as we all do. But I simply needed to say how thankful I am that they are in my life, and share with me as much as they do.

So on this last Sunday in the Thanksgiving Season, as we face the crimson tide of Christmas and Advent, let us once again pause, and reflect on all that we have, of all that we have been given, of the One from whom we came and the One to whom we are going.

Let us pray.