

Psalm 93 (New Revised Standard Version)

The Lord is king, he is robed in majesty; the Lord is robed, he is girded with strength. He has established the world; it shall never be moved; your throne is established from of old; you are from everlasting. The floods have lifted up, O Lord, the floods have lifted up their voice; the floods lift up their roaring. More majestic than the thunders of mighty waters, more majestic than the waves of the sea, majestic on high is the Lord! Your decrees are very sure; holiness befits your house, O Lord, forevermore.

Revelation 1:1-11 (New Revised Standard Version)

The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place; he made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, who testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw. Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of the prophecy, and blessed are those who hear and who keep what is written in it; for the time is near. John to the seven churches

One of the more significant experiences that influenced my faith was when I was serving a new church develop. along the NC coast. For 5 years, every year we endured at least one major hurricane, and we were totally powerless to avoid the damage and destruction.

I had never seen or experienced anything like it before, being hit dead-on by a terrible and devastating hurricane.

That was a big lesson in learning to trust and depend on God alone.

After each hurricane,

Kathy and I would visit all the congregation to survey losses, but rather than complaining about all the storm damage, we heard a remarkable sense of thankfulness & gratitude, for seemingly small blessings, for details that truly mattered, that were taken as signs of God's providence toward our recovery.

We grieved together and then worked together to restore & rebuild, and that experience of God abiding presence, faithfulness & grace has made an incredible difference in how I view and do ministry, and I believe helped me guide how this church responded to the Covid epidemic, together doing our best with a situation way beyond our control.

On Thursday we will all pause to celebrate Thanksgiving. Recently, I read more about the terrible suffering and losses of the Pilgrims on the Mayflower during that hard first year.

They began with such high hopes when they landed at Plymouth Rock, but then more than half of them died over that first harsh winter, from the bitter cold, deadly disease and a serious lack of food.

Some proposed a Day of Mourning to honor all those who had perished. Others said no, a Day of Thanksgiving would be more appropriate. After all, even though half had died, half had NOT.

They had reason to give thanks to the God who had seen them through, grateful to the Lord as described in Psalm 93, vs. 3-4, 1,

The floods have lifted up, O Lord, the floods have lifted up their voice; the floods lift up their roaring. **More majestic** than the thunders of mighty waters, **more majestic** than the waves of the sea, **majestic on high is the Lord!** **The Lord is king**, he is robed in majesty, he is girded with strength. **Even chaotic flood waters will submit to God's majesty.**

Not many years had passed since WWI, “the war to end all wars”,
and already the post-war peace was beginning to unravel,
and once again,
the world was heading back into chaos and turmoil.

Mussolini had ruled Italy for the past three years
with an iron fist of fearfully-brutal fascist violence.

Adolf Hitler had recently been released from jail and was gaining
strength and popularity with audacious rhetoric and violence,
as his **Nazi thugs fostered racial hatred and intimidation**,
largely by exploiting the fear and hopelessness
of a terrible **world-wide economic depression**.

Nations & culture, spinning out of control toward crisis and chaos.
Churches in Europe were mostly in steep decline,
and were largely unable or unwilling to address
the relevant issues of the day in a meaningful way.

Into that world, headed toward more violence, chaos & aggression,
and to a weakened and discouraged church that had lost its way,
Pope Pius XI of Rome wrote and released an encyclical,
“Quas Primas” on December 11, 1925,
also known as, ‘The Feast of Christ the King.’

In Quas Primas, the pope designated the Sunday proceeding Advent
that it be celebrated as, ‘the Feast of Christ the King Sunday,’
which was later adopted by many of the Protestant denominations
and it has been on the Presbyterian calendar since the 1960’s.

In this papal encyclical, the point was to assert uncompromisingly
1st, that God does still reign beyond and above all else,
no matter what the world around us is doing or saying,

2nd, that our problems stem from having rejected God’s word & truth,
& by allowing other things to rule our lives, other than Christ.

Christ is King – and our God does still rule and reign forever ----
- not the seemingly powerful forces that frighten and threaten
- not the corruptions against which we feel so powerless
- not even the injustice, hatred & violence of this world.

Like the Church of 1925, **the Church** today **needs to be shaken awake**,
reminded that Jesus is King of Kings and Lord of Lords,
that we are called & blessed **to make a difference in our world**
and that God’s promises are true, sure, and trustworthy.

The celebration of Christ the King Sunday calls us to remember
who by God’s grace we are and to whom we belong
and that though increasingly, our world and our culture
may reject or ignore the truth and message of Christ,
yet Christ does rule, and God’s purpose shall prevail,

for God is more powerful & sure than all the other forces around us
and so **we must not be passive**, compromise or surrender in fear
to the forces of our world and culture that we know are wrong,
and that promote a values-system and life-style
less than God’s purpose & intent for humankind.

The call for the Christian Church is to be faithful and useful,
for us to be, as Jesus explained, “**the salt and light of the world**”
to help restrain evil, to expose and fight against corruption,
by both our prayer and through our active participation.

Truth is lived when we let God’s love & mercy guide our affections,
toward a more grateful & whole, more hopeful & joyful perspective.

Our call is to reflect God and God’s love & truth out into our world,

to influence, by being agents of transformation in this world
by our being involved and active and serving in this world.

Jesus Christ is our King, so like a tennis player trying to improve,
we must faithfully and continuously **be working on our serve.**

When Jesus truly comes into our hearts and into our lives,
he always brings the rest of humanity in along with him,
for us to actively engage, to make it better, to make a difference.
We respond to God's grace through discipleship, by serving others.

Because we do know that Christ is King,
because we do know that God will surely accomplish his purpose,
we are set free from fear and doubt, or lost hopelessness,
for we know that God's rule is victorious and wonderful.

The one thing that most fascinates me about Christ the King Sunday,
even more than the historical context which I do truly enjoy,
is the Revelation Scripture passage suggested for this day.

When the book of Revelation was written, the situation was dire.

The current emperor, Domitian had decided that Christianity
was disrupting the cohesive unity of the Roman empire
so he set to destroy the Christian Church once and for all.

Under that persecution, the suffering of the Church was extreme,
struggling under vicious attack, & to be a Christian at that time
meant that you and your family might be tortured or killed,
and the cost of your church membership might be your life.

John wrote to encourage them, urging them to remain faithful to God

He begins by writing, vs. 1, *The revelation of Jesus Christ.*

The author uses a special form [plenary genitive] in the Greek that means both,

the revelation **from** Jesus and also the revelation **about** Jesus,

intending to remind them about the wonderful God we serve,

and that absolutely,

hope and light still shine even in the darkest circumstance,

as it's written in John 1:5,

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

That is the heart and grace of the message we read in Revelation,

a lesson in grace being spoken to a troubled & suffering people.

It's a word of hope for that fragile and persecuted Church
during their time of terrible struggle and harsh ordeal.

Revelation is a call to live in fervent hope and anticipation,
because whatever else is going on, our God still reigns above all.

The author never once tells them to duck and hide or panic,

or try to keep your faith in Jesus secret and hidden.
Also, it never says to strike back hard, and show your enemies
that the people of God are not to be trifled with or threatened.

The promise is, that we will never have to endure disaster alone,
because God is always with us to bring us through it all
according to his gracious purpose and infinite wisdom.

**That is the critical truth of Christ the King Sunday,
a message we especially need to hear and believe today,
because of who Jesus is, what he taught and what he did.**

All around the globe, terrible and destructive forces are at work.
Unspeakable violence, suffering, oppression and injustice
are brutally crushing the lives of the innocent & powerless.

Our own nation & culture are caught up in growing chaos of distrust.
Our nation and culture remain deeply divided & many are fearful.

Today I need to be reminded, refreshed and encouraged again
that hope is not lost, God is not defeated, for Christ is King,
and by God's power and purpose, **good will come of even this.**

And perhaps now more than ever, the Church must be **a place of grace**,
where the truth of God's love and mercy are made visible,
readily seen and reflected in the lives of Christians...
**... by valuing all humanity with a more gracious perspective,
by being a community that welcomes all of God's children.**

**Jesus is calling the Church to see people in a whole different way,
as beloved community of faith completely redefined by God's grace.**

Jesus has reached out to us with love and acceptance,
and the question is, will we respond and do the same?

**God has placed you and me in this particular place at this time,
within this difficult cultural moment in the history of humanity**

**to live and speak boldly and act restoratively in our culture,
to live out in the world, in our nation, community and homes
the love, truth & grace we have received from God in Christ.**

When a pastor-friend was called for Jury duty,
an attorney noticed that she was a pastor and wanted to know,
if she could set her religion aside and render a verdict
without letting her religious beliefs affect her decision?

She paused and thought for a moment, and then replied,
"I would hope that I would not make any decision without
the guidance & influence of my faith & religious beliefs."
And so she was excused from serving on the jury.

Her experience with the legal system raises a question about faith,
the lens through which we perceive life and live in the world.

Today we are reminded once again, **that Christ is King**,
that our God is never surprised, overwhelmed or befuddled,
& that the Lord will fulfill his healing purpose & promise.

From beginning to end God has his perfect plan & purpose worked out.
It's like instead of watching the parade go by from the sidewalk,
you look at it from a up in helicopter and can see it all at once.
God sees it all from before the beginning to beyond the end.

Our Christian hope is far more than just wishful thinking.
It is not self-confidence that we ourselves can defeat evil
or that we can withstand the storm by our own will or strength,
but it is a certainty in God and in God's promises,

and that becomes the source of our power and strength,
and the truth and hope by which God calls us to live.

That is part of God's promise, as God's purpose **becomes our hope**.

Christ the King Sunday reminds us that God is on his throne,
and the challenge of our lives, our choices about living,
is Jesus really ruling on the throne of our lives?

This week we will celebrate our national Thanksgiving holiday --
for truly we are a people most abundantly blessed & loved by our God

And as we gather with family and friends over football and feast,
and as we are grateful for home, health and hearth,
for all the material blessings in such abundance,

let us not be distracted or forget that Jesus Christ is King,
which calls us to be thankful to God for the greatest gift of all,
the gracious healing love of God in sending the Lord, vs. 8,6,

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

Or as Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 9:15,

Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!

... and a joyful and happy Thanksgiving to all!