

Last Pentecost: Christ the King Sunday
 November 23, 2014
 Rev. Ken Wratten at St. Stephen's, San Jose
 Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24
 Ephesians 1:15-23
 Matthew 25:31-46

Today is the Last Sunday of Pentecost season, and the last Sunday of the Christian year, the day that we celebrate Christ as King. Today can also be referred to as the Reign of Christ Sunday, since it reveals what the world will be like when Jesus' sovereign rule over all is accomplished.

The prophet Ezekiel tells of God's role as our Great Shepherd. God says of his sheep, "I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak." God tells Israel that he will choose between the rams and goats; those who are true followers and those who are not, based on their conviction to stay close to God no matter what. This is the description of a final judgment. This message was not going to the lost people who had never known God, but to the Jews in exile in Babylon, who had lost their way with God. He promised to care for those who truly follow him, and to lead them home.

The Gospel gives us a different image of the final judgment; as a time when Christ rules as king. To get to the heart of this message, it's important for us to know the Jewish understanding of kingship. For Israel, David was the exemplary king. The OT defined the role of David's kingship as being **responsible to share God's kingship**, to care for the poor and needy, and to defend the weak. The king **establishes** order, **defends** the people, and **defeats chaos**. The king **shares with God** the responsibility of caring for creation. Kingship in Judaism is a calling to work in partnership with God.

In the judgment story Jesus tells, he expects true believers to care for the poor and needy and weak. Believers share with Christ in caring for creation. We Christians are called to share in kingship with Jesus. This is a **calling** to do righteous things out of care for people, without need for reward.

Our taking on a nature of radical caring of people who cannot care for themselves is a lot to take on. It takes time and work and money and emotional energy, and often a good measure of faith. But then, the life, the love, and the dreams that come from God are always a few sizes too big for us, sort of like the clothes our mother bought for us as kids, knowing we would quickly grow into them. We can choose to put God's Dream for us away in a drawer labeled 'impossible dreams'. Or we can choose to grow into them. God knows we can. And Jesus shows us what it looks like when humanity grows into God's Dream."

The people who are accepted, who please God, are those who do what their very nature demands of them. That is why our personal Walk in faith is an experience in transformation. Walking the Way involves you and me submitting our very nature to be transformed into the nature of Jesus Christ, who was sent to be our model for godly living. So the question becomes whether we are giving reign over our life to Christ as our king.

Or do we let fear of ISIS / Al-Qaeda reign over our lives?
 Or the fear of a disabling illness? Or of growing old?
 Or the need to protect our pride at the cost of forgiving someone?
 Or ensuring our own comfort over helping someone else have ONE GOOD DAY?

Our CALLING is to take on the reign of Christ as our king.
 The TEST is to see that our actions come from our nature – not from a sense of duty to serve Christ; but instead to reflect that we see Christ in people – and we serve them.

Walking with Christ is giving him reign in our life; and in fact giving him reign over our whole life; it changes how we look at the sick, the homeless, the poor, and those in prison. I have experienced that change in my life; have you? When we give him reign, we find that his kingdom is partially realized here and now. Let me share a few examples.

Martin of Tours was a Roman soldier, and a Christian. One cold winter day, as he was entering a city, a beggar stopped him and asked him for alms. Martin had no money; but the beggar was blue and shivering with cold, and Martin gave what he had. He took off his worn and frayed soldier's coat; he cut it in two and gave half of it to the beggar.

That night he had a dream. In it he saw the heavenly places and all the angels, and Jesus in the midst of them; and Jesus was wearing half of a Roman soldier's cloak. One of the angels said to him, "Master, why are you wearing that battered old cloak? Who gave it to you?" And Jesus answered softly, "My servant Martin gave it to me."

A mom and dad thanked us last week for preschool chapel for their two children. They said I had no idea how important it is to them.
 We made visits and calls last week to stay connected with members for whom it is harder to get here: Morrie and Maggi; Eve; Ann

Our acceptance of Jesus as king of our life shows itself in our nature as people who want to serve wherever service is needed; whether it is service for each other, in our neighborhood, or beyond...

The heart of the challenge we have as modern Christians is how to live our whole life: secular / community / business / and spiritual life as an integrated, anchored person who honors Christ as King in everything we do. In Scripture we are assured the daily, living presence of God the Great Shepherd, and Christ the King to inspire us and guide us toward being all that we were created to be. We are called to honor Christ as King.

Amen.