

Like many people at the end of a year, I take some time to reflect on the year past. Although the world around us is already celebrating and selling Christmas and looking forward to the end of 2006, today is year's end for us.

Today, at the end of the church year, we are asked to think back over this year and ponder the mysteries of truth as they have been revealed to us each Sunday.

We read from Mark this last year – succinct – Mark wasted no words, and so we learned to take note of what he did say. There was Jesus' baptism, the calling of the disciples, the stumbling and ignorance of these same disciples, Jesus' transfiguration and appearance of Elijah and Moses.

In Mark there are two miracle stories of feeding thousands of people, miracles healing stories, parables and mission for the disciples.

We heard Jesus tell of his suffering and death to come. We see Jesus praying in Gethsemane and the trial, and then his death, resurrection, and an empty tomb that leaves the women fleeing in terror and amazement saying nothing to anyone.

After 7 weeks of celebrating Easter, we came to Ascension Sunday, the time when Jesus was seated at the right hand of the Father and began to reign from heaven, one with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

Now on Christ the King Sunday, the church proclaims that Christ reigns now and forever. We find ourselves today in a world ruled by Christ the king. A king whose reign assures us of the progressive defeat of the powers of evil until the final day of Jesus' return.

So, as the year ends, our scripture lessons speak about the "end times". On this final Lord's Day of our church year, we listen to apocalyptic visions from Daniel and Revelations about the end day, the final judgment. And we hear Jesus questioned by Pilate before he is handed over for suffering, crucifixion and death. On this last Sunday, we confess that Jesus crucified is indeed Lord of all.

What does it mean that Jesus is king? What does it mean for us to live in the reign of Christ?

Historically, a king was someone who was looked to for provision of food and clothing, and also for protection. People under the rule of a king expected peace and prosperity to come and be maintained by the king. We know that kings and queens have not always ruled with justice and equality for all guiding their actions. And, more than once we have heard of abuses of power, excessive wealth and lavish spending by the monarchs, and so our image of kings/kingdom are a little bit skewed to say the least.

And so, it is strange for us to talk about having a king, especially one who doesn't rule by the world's standards of dominance, violence, lies, and indulgence.

In Christ, God showed divine power in our lives. It's not what we associate with royalty and monarchic rule. God's royal crown is a crown of thorns. The cross, to what we bow.

Jesus was taken to Pilate by the ways of the world. He was handed over to people who wanted to maintain their power and control. Jesus went to the cross and he died. But that was not the end.

Pilate's power, our power, crucified Jesus.  
But our power was not, is not most powerful:  
There is One more powerful than we are.  
One ruling our world, not by threat or intimidation,  
but in love and mercy.

In our gospel today Pilate is representative of our world. He is the symbol of what rules our world and what pulls us away from God. Pilate represents empires, power, intimidation, greed, and desire for power. And WE are Pilate – wanting to do the right thing, but not if it costs too much...know what we should do but rationalizing our way out of it...squirming under uncomfortable truths and trying to get away from people who speak them.

Jesus says, "My kingdom is not of this world". His kingdom is not defined, measured or operated according to our standards and assumptions. His kingdom is not of this world, but he doesn't say it's not here. Jesus called many to lives of justice, compassion, trust and love not to money, swords and soldiers, and dominance. Jesus reigns with justice and with grace and love.

Christ our king is triumphant over sin and death. He is enthroned in glory and we await his final appearance. It is time to make his reign present in our world. Living in the reign of Christ, we, too, are engaged in a progressive defeat of the powers of evil in this world.

John Mansfield in his play "The trial of Jesus," pictures Pilate's wife remaining in the judgment hall long after everybody else has left. Finally, a soldier who had taken part in the crucifixion comes in and she asks him, "Is he dead yet?" The soldier shakes his head and says, "No, lady, he is not dead." She questions him further, "But surely he is dead, he has been hanging there so long now." And the soldier replies, "No, lady, he is not dead. His love is let loose in the world now, and *nobody* [neither Jew nor Roman] can stop him."<sup>i</sup>

And we are asked to join him. Jesus said to his disciples, "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

The longest part of the church year is the season of Pentecost. The season where we remember that we have a portion of Christ's Spirit, enabling us to embody the truth of his reign. This Spirit has made us a people – a people belonging to Christ. We gather in word and sacrament to be fed. We embrace one another as brothers and sisters. And when we gather around the table, we gather as servants, and we receive our King in the body and blood that he gave for us. Strengthened and nourished we go out into the world to let love loose in our neighborhoods, in our communities, in this violent and needy world. Lead on, King Jesus, Lead on. Amen.

Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14  
Revelation 1:4b-8  
John 18:33-37  
Christ the King Sunday

November 26, 2006  
First Trinity Lutheran Church  
Pastor Wendy Moen

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<sup>i</sup> From The Rev. Dr. Wiley Stephens, "Thanksgiving in Three Tenses", November 23, 2003 Christ the King Sunday.  
Italics mine.