

Squamish United Church
Rev. Karen Millard
Reign of Christ

November 23, 2014

Scripture Readings:
Matthew 25:31-46

Resolution Throne

So here we are the last Sunday of the church year. "It's Reign of Christ Sunday, Christ the King Sunday, the last Sunday of the Christian year. Today we reflect back upon the mighty acts of God proclaimed every Sunday of this year. We celebrate that, because Christ emptied himself of the authority of God and humbled himself to the point of death on a cross, God has highly exalted him and given him the name that is above every name. Therefore every knee in heaven and on earth and under the earth should bow to him. (Philippians 2:6-10) He is King of Kings and Lord of Lords. (Revelation 19:16)

The Church through the ages has gotten a lot of mileage from this regal imagery. The royal pageantry, the cathedrals, the robes, the brass, even the crown: "All hail the power of Jesus' name, let angels prostrate fall. Bring forth the royal diadem, and crown him Lord of All!" This powerful imagery captures our collective imagination."¹I am not a fan of the empire, kingdom kind of language of the past but imagine if the kind of reign we were talking about with the reign of peace, justice, love and grace. What if the way God reigns in our lives really matter.

Next week find ourselves celebrating the new year with a theme of Great Expectations, cherishing new babes in our families and church community, getting ready for the season and year ahead. Even before that I will have an opportunity this week to celebrate one of my favourite holidays "U.S. Thanksgiving." When I was young we almost always had to Thanksgiving days in our family; Canadian and U.S. This year I'm sharing that tradition with my family and taking them to Oregon for a family celebration U.S. Thanksgiving style.

That got me thinking that perhaps thinking about Christ's reign in our lives might be cast through this lens this year -- "the lens of gratitude for knowing an alternative power in our lives and to consider how that authority actually makes a difference for how we live."²

Gratitude for the example of the life of Jesus who shows us how to live a different way. For showing us a different kind of empire living. Perhaps we can be thankful for being taught a way of being in the world that both challenges the world and loves the world. There are so many ways to be in this world. "We know that Christ's kingdom is opposite all. That it challenges empire. That it calls out power that is abusive. But if it is to make any difference in our lives we have to

¹ http://day1.org/6257-god_has_left_the_building

² Lewis, Karoline workingpreacher.org

live as if that kingdom exists and that our participation in it, commitment to it, and dedication to bringing it about matters. For us, for God, for the world.”

I fully believe that God’s presence and kingdom is here and now on the earth. I believe that the presence of holy love, compassion and grace exist. I also believe that we are called to make that kingdom visible throughout the world. I believe God needs us for the kingdom to be more than it could be without us.

Another one of today’s lectionary passages was Ezekiel 34 it holds another powerful image of shepherd. God comes as a shepherd. The shepherds have failed to do their job. “God’s shepherds have not gathered in the weak sheep. God’s shepherds have not sought the lost or healed the sick or done what God called them to do. So God, out of great love for humanity and powerful compassion for the lost, goes forth. “I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep and I will make them lie down,” says the Lord God. “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 takes off and joins the search....But to live into God’s reign, to obey God’s call upon our lives, we must join God in the search, in the great shepherding work. Our God is a wandering God willing to engage in the nasty, challenging, dangerous work of shepherding. God wants us followers to get out ...and search for the lost. To wander every part of the community. To go where most people would not dare to go. To go into situations that most people would avoid.

I think that, deep in themselves, *most* folks resonate with this image of God. I think that is what explains the popularity of Pope Francis. For Francis has gone out. He has added people to his staff whose sole job is to go out into the community, go out to the hurting, go out to be his eyes and ears, to see where the church should be at work.”³

Therefore, Reign of Christ Sunday is not only about acknowledging what this servant king’s reign looks like, but also participating in it. Intentionally and deliberately. “It means trusting in the words of Ephesians, so that, “with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power” (1:18-19).

This day in the liturgical year is about simultaneously a looking back and a looking forward. “A chance to look back on the year and imagine where, how, why, and when Christ’s ideal of the world has had power in your life. At the same time, it is an invitation to look forward and see how you want that to be true.”⁴

So as we look back and look forward I was thinking on this last Sunday of the liturgical year it would be a great opportunity for us to construct New Year’s resolutions. Some of us make

³ http://day1.org/6257-god_has_left_the_building

⁴ Lewis

resolutions every January. What if this year we made them in the liturgical calendar, and our resolutions were faith focused.

Think back for a moment and recall when have you seen God at work in your life or in the life of others. When have you seen someone live out God's love for you or others? What would it look like for you to be a person who lives like that more consistently? How can you be a citizen in that kind of kingdom? What if your resolutions at this time were at the heart of what the reign of Christ is all about.

As I have already said I am not a fan of the empire, kingdom kind of language of the past but imagine if the kind of reign we were talking about is the reign of peace, justice, love and grace. What if the way God reigns in our lives really mattered. What if this year we resolved to give the life God calls us to more of a serious focus.

At the end of the day, to believe in God's reign, has to be a claim on our present, and not just the future glory of "thy kingdom come." Jesus reminded us in our scripture today that to live God's call it matters how we treat every person we encounter. How we decide to live matters. "Not just for ourselves. Not just for those immediately around us. But for the sake of procuring the reign of Christ here and now. I wonder how many resolutions include, "My New Year's resolution is to strive for how to make the reign of Christ more possible for my neighbour."

Matthew's specifics are a good place to start. But they need to take on some specificity for us as a congregation and for each and every one of us to understand how crucial our role is in making Christ's kingdom possible.

Now, that would be a very different start to the new year wouldn't it. So I invite you to take a moment now and consider a resolution of life and faith. Not a resolution of how much weight you might lose, or how much money you might save, but a resolution that will assist in bringing the presence of the kingdom here and now more alive. Perhaps your resolution is to treat someone you have been less than loving to more kindly. Perhaps it is to volunteer in a Charity or give more freely. Perhaps you resolve to gossip less, and share stories or peoples successes more often. What if you resolved to begin every day with a focus on bringing about the kingdom of God's love and grace, that it might radiate from you. You decide what is right for you.

"We always wait for January to get on with our lives, but what would happen if we chose to get on with life now? How would Advent and Christmas be different? Because then, our presence and our preparation would actually reflect the reality of Christ's kingdom in-breaking now. Christ's reign will not wait until we are ready to sign up for our New Year's resolves. When we are fully prepared and perfect. It's here and now."⁵

May we live the kingdom out in our lives every day.
Amen.

⁵ IBID