

Colossians 1:11-20 “Rescued from Darkness”

If you can believe it, this is the last Sunday before Advent begins next week. You know what that makes this Sunday? It’s “Christ the King” Sunday. “What do you mean, Jesse? It’s Thanksgiving Sunday!” Well, okay, I won’t argue with you there. It *is* the Sunday before Thanksgiving. I will, however, point out that Thanksgiving Sunday isn’t a part of the church calendar. The church calendar is for churches all over the world, but Thanksgiving is a United States only holiday. The New Common Lectionary, which we generally go by, says it’s “Christ the King” Sunday or “The Feast of Christ the King” as it’s known in the Catholic Church. Most churches outside Catholic, Lutheran and Anglican traditions don’t observe Christ the King Sunday, but we do it every now and then here at First Christian Church, especially if there’s an open Sunday between Thanksgiving and Advent like last year. Let me tell you the origin story of the Feast of Christ the King so that you might have a better handle on why I choose to observe it every now and then.

Back in 1925, Pope Pius XI instituted this feast for the first time. Now think about what was going on in the world at that time. World War I ended in 1918, but the global aftermath of the war was still being felt seven years later. World War I started because an extreme Serbian nationalist assassinated the arch duke of Sarajevo in 1914. The war ended four years later with 9 million combatants dead and another 7 million civilian casualties due to the war itself. You also have to factor in an additional 100 million deaths from a global flu pandemic that resulted from the toxic biological conditions created by the war. And you’d think that this war would have taught folks a lesson about how dangerous nationalism is, but what happened right after this war? You started seeing the rise of nationalist fascism which is what World War II ended up being all about. So you can see where Pope Pius was going with this. Instituting the Feast of Christ the King was the church’s way of saying, “You know, this kind of destructive stupidity wouldn’t be happening if Jesus was King.” *And* for the Lutheran and Anglican

Churches to follow suit with this Christ the King observance ... that was *shocking*. Catholics and Protestants usually spent their energy on telling the world how different they were from one another, but for them to stand united was a *powerful* prophetic statement.

I like to call this observance “Reign of Christ” Sunday. I think we have a better handle on that term, and it paints a bigger picture of not just Christ as *King*, but what the world might look like under his rule. This observance is the church’s opportunity to ask, “What *would* the world be like if Jesus reigned?” It’s a challenge to both the Earth’s rulers and to the ones who elect rulers to do better. To be more like Jesus. So. It’s been a year since we observed Reign of Christ Sunday. Because according to my notes, we did observe it last year. So let’s think about what has happened since then.

Since last year, many democratic nations in the world have elected leaders who’ve rejected toxic nationalism in favor of leaders who are willing to open their hearts and minds to Jesus’ teachings. Great Britain and Australia are the two of the most notable examples. And here in our own nation, all the divisions that we were facing since last year have been ironed out, and people get along better, especially in the political sphere. We’ve put partisanship behind us. We’ve learned to communicate better and to be respectful to each other. We’ve really come together as a nation and a world. We’ve made huge efforts to protect the needy and the alien as the Bible teaches us to do. And let’s not forget the number of billionaires who have banded together after a great deal of collective soul searching and self-reflection to share the bounty of their accumulated wealth in order to address some of the biggest challenges facing the world. Racism has been eliminated. Prejudice is considered crass and unfashionable. And all this happened because so many people in positions of power were so moved by the prophetic message of Christ’s united church in the world that they said, “Enough is enough. We must decrease so Christ might increase.”

Now, of course, I should explain that I just stepped out of an inter-dimensional portal from an alternate reality where the light of truth shines brightly and all of God's people live up to their divine potential in peace and harmony. You all, on the other hand, live in *this* dimension where the power of darkness threatens to overcome the light and things are getting worse with the speed of a runaway freight train. But hey ... don't shoot the messenger. I'm just reporting about what's happening on the other side of the portal where the firstborn of all creation ... the one who is the image of God has rescued the people from the darkness and brought them into the light of truth.

Back in October I started sort of a mini-series on hope and made a declaration that we were going to start Advent early this year because we need a little hope after the year we've had on this side of the portal. I think this passage from Colossians is the perfect transition into Advent Season and even better since we just wrapped up the book of Colossians on Thursday at Bible Study. A lot of times, we in the church focus on Jesus as the one who was tried for treason, wrongfully executed but then rose again. And yes, Jesus is the crucified and risen Christ and we affirm that in the church. But ... Jesus is *also* the Son in the image of the Invisible God who is first over all creation. And that's how our church new year starts ... with the birth of the one who is called "The King of Kings and Lord of Lords." And *if* Jesus is King of King and Lord of Lords, who, then, is *not* King of King and Lord of Lords? Right! Caesar. Which, as far as we who follow Christ is concerned, means every ruler in the world who is *not* Christ.

So the question I want to throw on the table this morning is, "What would it look like if Jesus actually reigned here on earth?" But that might be a little much for what we're trying to do here this morning. There are so many models for how to rule that we'd be here all morning. So let's narrow it down to something we're most familiar with. Rather than talk about King Jesus, let's talk about President Jesus. And before you say anything, I know how weird that sounds. And I know the potential theological can of worms this might open by just by putting the

words “president” and “Jesus” next to each other. I’m doing this for time’s sake, so work with me.

When we look for the qualities, characteristics, and values that we think a good leader should have, we here in the United States, look for someone who represents the people. “Of the people, by the people and for the people” to quote Abraham Lincoln. And that’s great. But what shapes people’s values? For the most part, it’s culture. Generally speaking, we’ve elected people who represent our culture ... or at least certain aspects of our culture prevalent during the time the leader is elected. Who our nation elects during any given time in history tells us a lot about us during that period of history. And it’s no surprise that the pendulum swings from side to side ... sometimes quite a bit over the course of time because the cultural attitude, the cultural character, the cultural *ethos* changes. So if we’re going to talk about what “President Jesus” would look like, you’ve got to understand that as far as Jesus is concerned, there are only two cultures on the table to consider – the culture of God (or in this case, the reign or kingdom of God) and the culture of earth or “the world.” Heavenly or worldly. That’s how Jesus thinks. So right off the bat, voters have a candidate that sees the world only in either/or terms. Either you’re in the kingdom of God, or you’re in the kingdom of the world. Hmm. Okay, well let’s consider some other aspects of Jesus that voters might take into consideration. What about issues? We always talk about how important issues are. Okay, so what are some issues that represent Jesus’ values?

Okay. Jesus is highly critical of people who are driven by the love of money or use their money to beat others down. He also talks about forgiving debts. Oops. Okay. Probably going to have a tough time raising funds for his campaign. Stands on the side of the poor, the oppressed, and the marginalized. Not just sometimes, but always. Even when it doesn’t make sense. Puts a high priority on widows, orphans, the blind and the sick.

Places high priority on healing for all regardless of pre-existing conditions. He's very clear and consistent about his agenda – The first speech he made when his public ministry started had a solid mission statement - “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor, he has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.” Also claims to be the Son of God, and once said, “God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.” Left his followers with the commission to “go into all the world and teach *all* nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.”

He talks about repentance, redemption, and the forgiveness of sins. He's all about free food and is especially fond of bread, fish, and wine. He says we should forgive our enemies and do good to those who hate us. Good grief. What's up with this guy? We talk a lot about whether a candidate is electable or not. Let's face it, Jesus wouldn't stand a chance of being President. He's just too radical. And you can't put him in a box. He would be unelectable. Which says way more about us as a culture than it does about Jesus as a candidate. We try to make excuses for him because there's a lot of things he says that are great ... it's just that he can be scary sometimes. On one hand he says that his yoke is easy and his burden is light, but then he turns around and says we need to deny ourselves, take up our crosses and follow him which doesn't make sense because that's neither easy nor light.

So back to our question for the morning – “What would the world look like if Jesus reigned?” I guess we won't really know until the culture of Christ truly takes root among us and transforms us until a new world is born in the midst of the old. Until then, we continue to study and make sure our welcome is open to all, because the culture of God's beloved Son is a culture of freedom and forgiveness and hospitality and the most outrageous, scandalous, all-embracing love we can imagine!