

Zion Lutheran Church, Stratford, November 20, 2011,  
Christ the King/Reign of Christ Sunday  
*Your Kingdom Come*  
Rev. Robert Hutchison

**Worship Introduction** Following the Sunday readings for the church year today is called Christ the King or Reign of Christ Sunday. It is the last Sunday of the church year, but rather than think of it as a year end, regard it as having reached that point where we are welcomed into God's ***"kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."*** Next Sunday we go back to the beginning, Advent, God redeeming the world: following the birth, life, death and resurrection and ascension of Christ, and the time beginning with Pentecost under the teaching and guiding of the Holy Spirit leading us to this day, ready to step into the fullness of the eternal reign of Christ. It is a day of great joy! Let the Psalmist's words be ours today. ***"O Come, let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker! For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand."***

"For the Lord God omnipotent reigneth . . . Alleluia!" These words from Handel's Messiah are so appropriate for today. Rather than hear it at Christmas or Easter I would much rather that it be our worship this morning, here and in every congregation throughout our land, our worship, not a performance. We ask this morning: what brings us to this moment joyful awareness? Three words: sin, grace, and faith.

The Gospel reading today begins with this tone of joy. ***"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory."*** Suddenly the picture becomes very human. All nations are gathered before him and they are separated like sheep and goats. Where would you be in that crowd. With my stubbornness the goat would be a better fit for me. Then Jesus addresses the nations. He invites the ones on his right, **the righteous** they are called, to inherit the kingdom prepared by his Father. They fed him when he was hungry, gave him drink when he was thirsty, welcomed him, a stranger, clothed him when he was naked, visited and took care of him when he was sick, visited him in prison. Those on his left, called **the accursed**, he said, did none of these things to him. Both crowds were perplexed. "Lord, when did we see you in this state?" They said. To the crowd on his right Jesus said. I'm quoting Eugene Peterson's paraphrase, The Message, ***"Whenever you did one of these things to someone overlooked, or ignored, that was me – you did it to me!"*** The ones on his left did none of these things.

What is noteworthy here is that each group did not know that they were "doing" or "not doing" these things. Which group are we in? It won't do any good to take out our checklist and tick off the things we have done for others because these people in the story didn't know they were doing or not doing them. Where does that leave us then? Do we just go on living our lives hoping that we will end up being called 'righteous' and not 'accursed'? That Christ will somehow see us good enough to enter into his glorious kingdom? What a fearful way to live. That's not at all what Jesus is teaching in this story. The key is in this word righteous. The Concise Oxford Dictionary describes a righteous person as: just, upright, virtuous, law-abiding. There might be a number of here today who say, "I come close to that, pretty close," and hope Jesus will overlook the times when we slipped. The great prophet Isaiah looks at himself and the people of Israel with this description. ***"We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy cloth."***(Is. 64:6) If this is true then how come Jesus calls the people on his right righteous?

It's all about sin, grace, and faith. Let me begin with a question. When did you discover that God sent you out of the Garden – the Garden of Eden? That's another way of asking, when did you realize you were a sinner? Well, isn't everybody? Yes. Does that make us bad people? No. We are created in God's image, capable of caring for this wonderful world in which we live, but we've blown it and can't be God's people any more without redemption. Sin does not keep us from being God's people

but it separates us from God, breaks the holy relationship God holds for us all.

The reading from Ezekiel we heard earlier is a strong and caring picture of God's commitment to us. God is the Shepherd and the people are his sheep. God is fed up with those he appointed to care for his sheep and decides to do it himself. ***"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 . . . You are my sheep, and the sheep of my pasture and I am your God, says the Lord God."*** (Ez. 34:15.16.31) This is what God is giving us in Jesus Christ. This is grace, God redeeming the world through the sacrifice of Christ, as the writer to the Hebrews says, ***"he has appeared once for all at the end of the age to remove sin by the sacrifice of himself. . . so Christ having offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin, but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him."*** (Hrb. 9:26.27) This gift of God, the removal of our sin, is ours through faith, believing, and this faith leads us into a way we do not know because it is God's way, not ours. It is following God's way in Christ that gives us the righteousness of God in which to live. When Jesus, in this story of the end times, addresses the righteous he invites those who knowing the sins that plague them, have received their redemption in Christ and follow in faith, eagerly waiting for Christ to come! It is our eager waiting for Christ to come that makes this day, Christ the King/Reign of Christ such a joyous day.

Life is real very simple. It's either My way or God's way. My way is controlled, predictable, self-centered, honouring the idols of the world around me, sex, money and power. God's way is new every day because it removes my sin and blesses me with the power of the Holy Spirit.

Most of you know that I recently underwent prostate surgery. It was a success. When I awoke in the hospital room after the operation my blood pressure was very low. I was covered with warm blankets. To my surprise, however, I felt I was being held being supported by the hands of all who had prayed for me. I had received many thoughtful cards, calls and emails. They were all there, holding me. That was God's way for which I do not cease to give thanks.

That was Paul's experience in the prayer of thanksgiving he gave for the Ephesians in his letter to them in today's second reading. Recognizing their faith and love he prayed with great hope acknowledging ***"the immeasurable greatness of God's power for us who believe"***, a power which God put to work in Christ making, ***"him the head over all things for the church which is his body"***. We need to understand that the church is not the denominations where we find ourselves. They are human organizations and as such also need the path of sin grace and faith to find their way. The real church is those who have heard Christ's call and follow him in faith. These are the righteous who stand before Christ on the last day.

Dear people of Zion and those who may be visiting today. A sermon is meant to bring you some understanding and insight into the Scriptures that are read during worship to nurture your faith and give you courage to follow God's way. These Scriptures say much more than I am capable of sharing . I strongly urge you to take them home and spend more time with them. May these words of Luther in his meaning of the second article of the Apostles Creed be your words, ***"that I may belong to him, live under him in his kingdom, and serve him in eternal righteousness, innocence and blessedness."***

Amen.