**November 25, 2018**

**Christ the King; John 18:33-37**

Contrary to persistent rumors, the book of Revelation is not about the end of the world. This book is a word of hope to faithful disciples being persecuted in the first century. It tells of people’s attempts to dominate and manipulate in our human arrogance. Then, standing in glorious contrast, Revelation describes God’s rightful and almighty rulership over all of creation. Just in these opening verses we hear about “God who is and was and is to come” and “Christ the ruler of kings of the earth, the one who made *us* into a kingdom.” Our triune God has been, continues to be, and will always be The Ruler of earth. Our rightful ruler draws us into one kingdom as one people, not scattered between various sovereignties’ countries and states. Just as we are part of the one body of Christ, so we will be God’s one family, citizens in God’s one kingdom.

For Americans, the talk about kingdoms is a little strange and otherworldly. Kingdoms are fairy tale locations and political designations. When we hear “kingdom,” we wonder about borders and traditions and political parties. What family is the ruling family? How long have they been in power? Who is their opposition? We think about the various separation methods used to keep the power *in* one kingdom and *out* of another. And while we might like the romantic notion of our being citizens in the kingdom of God, there are other kingdoms and earthly powers that also call us their own. This country, the state of New York, and our local town government all think that we owe them something for being citizens within the realm. Our government is reliant upon its citizens to pay taxes and follow certain laws, even if those things do not align with God’s kingdom. If we wanted to declare our citizenship *only* in God’s kingdom, we have to remember that “the kingdoms of the world rarely give up power without a fight.” [[1]](#footnote-1) The kingdoms of this world expect us to repopulate and be good, model citizens in order to continue *their* current power; so if we want to be citizens of the kingdom of God, staying *first* within God’s laws and borders and kingdom, we must be careful and intentional as we order our lives in potential opposition to earthly rulers, laws, and traditions.

It’s not *just* about politics and national identity. Our identity – our citizenship – is usually displayed by how we spend our time and where we place our priorities: If you wait overnight in a long line to be the first person to get a new iPhone or Nintendo Switch or a popular Christmas toy, you are showing allegiance to a particular brand or store. If you forego charitable donations to take a lavish vacation, or hide at home instead of helping a neighbor with a necessary chore, you are acting outside the kingdom of God. Evening soccer practices that prevent family dinners? A job that prevents you from spending time with your adult children and grandchildren? We justify these choices by saying that they help us give *more* to our children or family or church. And they may do that, but they are also a sign of the powers and principalities whose laws we truly value. They are a sign of the rulers of our heart.

Today is Christ the King Sunday. It is the last Sunday of the church year; the church’s New Year’s Eve. We spent the past twelve months celebrating Christ’s life. We lit candles on Christmas Eve to remember his birth. We followed his journey to the cross. We mourned on Good Friday and rejoiced on Easter Sunday. Now, after weeks and months of retelling our Christian stories, as we enter a series of outrageous, secular, consumer-driven weeks, on this Christ the King Sunday we acknowledge that we are not meant for this world. We are not meant to follow the rules of shopping and glamour and self-interests and political boundaries; we are God’s children and citizens of God’s Kingdom. We pay homage to the King of Kings. We bow down to worship the Lord of Lords. We may live on Long Island. We may be residents of the state of New York and citizens of the United States of America, but our true identity is in another realm. Our true identity is a beloved child of God, part of a family that spans the height and depth of the world, going beyond brick-and-mortar walls and language barriers and cultural traditions. This is why American flags are removed from the top of a veteran’s casket in a Christian funeral. It doesn’t matter what earthly kingdom you served; it doesn’t matter what language you spoke; it doesn’t matter how much you earned; in life and in death, we belong to God.[[2]](#footnote-2) We, and all that we have, all that we do, belongs to God.

We demonstrate our citizenship in God’s kingdom by our words and actions, our thoughts and intentions. Coming to church, tithing, helping strangers and neighbors, and praying the Lord’s Prayer – these things affirm Christ’s rule and God’s Kingdom. When we do these things, we affirm God’s kingdom, not ours. Not America, not Europe, not white-male-privilege power. When we pray “thy kingdom come,” we are asking for God’s will, not ours. We place ourselves solely in God’s hands, dependent upon whatever God wills and gives. Praying “thy kingdom come” turns us away from any loyalty we had to ourselves or our family or our alma mater or whatever is our native/natural/comfortable way of thinking and being, and instead turns us to God’s way of thinking, being, and doing.

At the wedding in Cana, Jesus’ mother, Mary, told the wine servers, "Do whatever he tells you." That’s what we need stamped on our own foreheads. When we ask God about God’s will for our lives and the world, then when we *listen* for the answer, then we experience the power of God’s kingdom in our midst.

Famed New York City Presbyterian preacher, Frederick Buechner, wrote that the kingdom of God is not a time or place, but a condition. The kingdom of God is a way of being, and a way of doing. Buechner argued that God's kingdom is being accomplished among us right now – in various ways, large and small. Buechner believed that God’s kingdom is not something we are waiting to come to be some day in the future; he believed that God’s kingdom has *already* come. AND yet, at the same time, in some mysterious both-and twist, God’s kingdom is also not fully here. Since we cannot fully live as good citizens within God’s kingdom until we die or Christ comes again, since the ways that we do God’s will are (at best) half-baked and half-hearted, God’s kingdom is also *still* a long way off. [[3]](#footnote-3) God’s kingdom is both, and. God’s kingdom is past, present, and future. God’s kingdom has existed since the beginning of all things. It continues to exist now, and is also something yet-to-be. God who was, who is, and who will be.

So we can’t rest on our laurels. Because God’s kingdom is still coming to be, as faithful disciples, we must continue to look for Christ in the world and in our hearts. It’s so hard. The powers and principalities of the world work feverishly to keep their own kingdoms at play in the world. So God’s children must work even harder to ensure Christ’s light and life find a place to grow. Scraped on the wall of a barrack in one of Hitler’s concentration camps, underneath a crudely drawn Star of David in rough lettering on a crumbling wall, were these words: “I believe in the sun even when it does not shine. I believe in love even when it is not shown. I believe in God even when he does not speak.” God is here. Christ is king. Our political clouds may diminish his glory. Our darkness may threaten to overwhelm Christ’s light, but it is living and breathing and present each and every moment, waiting to break through the clouds, when every eye will see and every ear will hear and all will know his rightful rule.

This is the good news: Jesus was Lord when we went to bed last night, Jesus is Lord while we sit here in worship, and Jesus will be Lord when we go out these doors in an hour. No matter how bad the news headlines may be, we believe in the good news. Christ is Lord of all.

The promise of his reign is not only for today but for tomorrow. Jesus said, "I am the Alpha and the Omega." The Pilates of this world will disappear, and most will be forgotten, but the reign of Jesus is forever and ever.

So then let us work and live as the citizens of God’s kingdom that we are. Let us hope and watch, love and serve. Let us faithfully pray “thy kingdom come” each and every day. For “In praying the Lord’s Prayer, we are busy becoming as that for which we yearn.” [[4]](#footnote-4)

Come, Lord Jesus, rule in our hearts and minds and souls and strengths, rule over the kings and queens of this earth, rule over all that is and was, that we may bring about your kingdom here and now. Amen.

1. Willimon, William H. & Stanley Hauerwas, Lord, Teach Us. pg. 51 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *A Brief Statement of Faith*, PCUSA “Book of Confessions.” [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. "Listening to Your Life" [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Willimon, William H. & Stanley Hauerwas. Lord, Teach Us. pg. 58. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)