

“Jesus Rules!”

November 26, 2017

#blessed series – Christ the King Sunday

“King” isn’t a word that I use very much to describe my relationship with Jesus. And we don’t hear it in everyday conversation. From a faith perspective, how many of us call Jesus Christ our King? Images like Lord, Savior, and Friend are more popular than “King” these days.

And let’s be honest: we have a general dislike for authority. We may have some distrust for those in power. We’re anxious about living under someone else’s rules and about submitting to someone else. We like to control our own lives and live by our own rules. We don’t want to live under anyone else’s control.

I found myself thinking about that as we hosted family for Thanksgiving. I love Thanksgiving, and I love my family. But it’s a different rhythm. It changes the general routine of life for a few days. I notice my desire for control.

Yet, today we have to look at our relationship to Jesus as “King” because it matters when we follow Jesus. Today we celebrate Christ the King Sunday. It’s the last Sunday of the Christian year when we celebrate the coming reign of Jesus Christ. And Paul has a lot to say about Jesus’ rule in our lives.

Paul’s words to the Ephesians begin with how thankful he is for their faith and love. This letter was probably written in the middle of the first century AD as a way to encourage people in the early church. And it’s clear that this church has a good reputation. Paul has heard about their faith and love, and he’s thankful for their work and witness. But he wants them to know that it’s not just about them! Their relationship to Jesus reaches beyond their own lives.

Paul tells them how great God is, how much God has done for us, and how much we can do because we believe! He uses images that make us think of power and glory – Jesus sitting at God’s right hand and all things under his feet and the head over all things. One translation simply says, “And how tremendous is the power available to us who believe in God.”

Paul wants to get through to them that their success comes from God’s power at work in them, but it’s hard to explain. How do you explain God’s love and grace? How do we tell others about what God has done for us? How is Jesus’ authority in our lives a blessing to us?

The church in Ephesus was a mixed population of Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians, and Paul wanted them all to know the truth of God’s love in Jesus. Jesus is

the Christ – the Messiah - the promised One of God - the Son of God – who rules over all of creation. Jesus rules. Jesus is King.

(SLIDE) So, here's the "tweet" from Paul to the Ephesians: *That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that can be invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.*

If you're quick at counting, you already know that it's too long to be a tweet because it's more than 140 characters. But maybe we can simplify it. Simply put Jesus rules! **(SLIDE)** And his reign gives us hope - not just for us personally, or for the church, but even for the whole world!

And yet how strange to call Jesus "king!" Consider the way he came into the world, the way he ministered and risked his reputation, and the way he gave of himself—Jesus turns the tables on our definition and expectation of a "king" completely upside-down! His kingship is being a true servant sent by God to redeem and restore us to wholeness and life. As people who follow him, we're called to serve and show his power – the power of servanthood.

Today marks the end of the Christian year and the beginning of a new Christian year. Next week we enter the season of Advent. All year long, since last Advent began, Jesus has been our focus. We mark our time in the church by Jesus Christ and remember his presence and power with us.

Consider this year: Advent calls us to prepare for Jesus' birth and consider what it means that God sent Jesus into the world to be with us "in the flesh." Epiphany celebrates the magi traveling far, finding Jesus, and worshipping him—a symbol of God's gift of love in Jesus for all people.

Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of Lent. We remember our mortality as human beings and begin the journey with Jesus toward the cross. On Holy Thursday and Good Friday, we remember Jesus' command to the disciples to love one another and then his cruel death.

On Easter, we're transformed by the news of Jesus' resurrection. He's alive, and we're people who live in the hope of new life. At Pentecost, we remember the overwhelming power of the Holy Spirit as it came among people of many nations and gave birth to the church.

From then on, we follow Jesus in ministry. He fed the hungry and ate with people called "unfit" and "undesirable" by the majority. He met physical and spiritual needs and healed people who were hurting. Then, we come to today—when we shout with joy and praise God because Jesus Christ is King. We are his people, and we believe that he will come again and bring the fullness of God's Kingdom!

In all that we do, Jesus is our focus and our foundation. Jesus is the reason we're here together. Among us there are different experiences of coming to faith and continuing to understand what it means to follow Jesus. We don't agree on everything, but it's Jesus who breaks down barriers and brings us together. He is our foundation. His love and sacrifice transforms us into new people. His place as Lord and Savior isn't just an eternal hope; it's hope that we claim now and live now not just for ourselves, but it's our witness to the world.

The Christian calendar calls today Christ the King Sunday. But, isn't every day to demonstrate our loyalty to Christ the King? Perhaps it's a day for us to re-commit ourselves as we enter a new year. What will we do that we haven't been doing? How will we love and care more deeply? Jesus Christ isn't a secret to be kept, but a joy and story to be shared with truth and courage. Friends, today and every day, Christ is King. Jesus rules!

Paul talks about the power that lifts people from the deadness of sin to new life. It's not hard to believe that God has that kind of power, but Paul says that we who follow Jesus have that same power. We have resurrection power – the power to bring life, hope, and healing when we place our trust in Jesus.

Paul says there is nothing and no one more powerful than Jesus, which was quite a statement to make. Consider that Paul wrote this while in prison in Rome. The Roman Empire was in control, but Paul assures early Christians that even this powerful empire is no match for the power of God in Jesus Christ!

And Paul wants the people to understand that any success they've had isn't because of their own power or ability. It's because God is at work in them. We don't tend to talk about "success" in our faith life, but Paul claims that faithfulness means trusting in Christ and loving others. It's that vertical relationship and that horizontal relationship – a life that makes the cross. We're called to live a cross-shaped life – loving God and loving others for the sake of Jesus Christ the King.

You may not believe that you have any power, but we are all leaders to some degree. In daily life, we have authority or influence over others – as community leaders, teachers, caregivers, parents, friends. We are responsible and accountable to be faithful as God is faithful – wherever and however we serve in ministry, in our workplaces, in our homes. It matters what we say and do.

But it's more than seeing God's power in our lives. We see it in the church, too. Every time we gather, we say that that Jesus Christ is King. We say the Lord's Prayer: "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." "For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever." We pray for God's help to live under Jesus' rule together.

As servants of King, we are powerful people. We have the power to love as Jesus did, to care enough to bring healing, and to teach others God's ways. And we can't be

timid about this work; Jesus wasn't timid about loving others. He risked it all for the sake of others, and we're called to take risks for the sake of Jesus Christ going beyond our comfort zones.

Paul tells the church, too, that God has given us the gift of hope to continue on despite difficult circumstances. The early church experienced persecution and hardship, but kept sharing the Good News of Jesus.

We keep going. Yes, there is so much "bad news." Yes, there are personal struggles and family struggles. Yes, there is grief. Yes, we go through ups and downs. But the call to live out our faith hasn't changed. Christ is King, and we seek to follow him faithfully. If Christ really does reign in our hearts and in our lives, then we have to go out to love him and serve him.

One pastor says, "Jesus our king likes to go out into the streets in disguise. He turns up as a street person, a homeless, battered woman, a person of color being taunted by racists, and whispers to us that as we care for everyone, we care for him. As we care for him, we learn what loving sacrifice means. When we are humble enough to learn how to serve, we are ready to acknowledge Christ as king." That's a powerful statement: having humility enough to serve brings us closer to seeing Jesus as King.

Jesus rules, but he's different than any other king or anything else. We've just experienced Black Friday when people line up for the newest video game system and the good deals. How do we respond to a culture of getting more and wanting more? We hear of power plays and people misusing authority for their own gain and pleasure. How do we respond to an atmosphere where people are treated as "less than" and disrespected? We see war and hate around us. How do we live as people who follow One who brings peace and embodies love? We see people hungry for a simple meal. How do we give from our abundance?

And still Jesus calls us to serve – to live more simply and within our means, to ignore gossip, to speak and make peace, to share what we have – our food, our gifts, our money, our intellect – to bring his kingdom alive even today. Friends, we have work to do while we wait for Jesus to come again. We have to be the church that is his Body. Jesus rules and we witness to his rule every day.

And so we pray together as people of God redeemed by Christ and empowered by God's Spirit: "As Jesus Christ reigns as King in our hearts, may we rejoice in his peace, glory in his justice, and live in his love."

Today you're invited to touch the water as a reminder of your baptism in the name of Jesus Christ – King and Servant. If you've not been baptized, touch the water and know that God's grace is working in your life. You are God's beloved.

Let's pray together: