

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

CALL TO WORSHIP:

*The kingdom of the world
has become the kingdom of our Lord
and of his Messiah,
and he will reign for ever and ever!*
Let us worship God.

(Revelation 11.15)

HYMN: O servants of God, your Master proclaim!

PRAYER OF APPROACH AND CONFESSION:

Almighty, eternal, and holy God:

We acknowledge your greatness, and we praise you for your love, as we enter your presence to worship you.

As we begin our worship, though, we confess that we don't always acknowledge or praise you. In fact, we often wander away from you in order to go our own way — that is, to do things that please us and satisfy our desires, rather than the things that you want us to do. As we worship you now, we recognize that in going our own way, we actually attempt to place ourselves on the throne that is rightfully yours.

We acknowledge that we have sinned, then, and we ask you to forgive us. Take us back to yourself, we pray; and, through the work of the Holy Spirit, enable us more and more to follow the way of your desires rather than our own.

As we worship you this morning, then, help us once again to acknowledge your authority in our lives, and empower us to do better at living in your ways.

We pray in the name of Jesus, our Savior; and we pray together, now, as he taught us:

Our Father, which art in heaven:

Hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come.

*Thy will be done in earth,
as it is in heaven.*

Give us this day our daily bread.

*And forgive us our debts,
as we forgive our debtors.*

*And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil;*

*for thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory,
for ever. Amen.*

(Matthew 6.9-13, KJV)

ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS:

Hear this good news from the scriptures:

*God has rescued us from the dominion of darkness,
and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves,
in whom we have redemption —
the forgiveness of our sins.*

(Colossians 1.13-14)

So, if we have confessed our sin to God sincerely,
let us be assured that God will forgive us.

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION: Speak, your servants listen

SCRIPTURE READINGS:

- **Old Testament Reading:** 2 Samuel 23.1-7 - King David's last words

In this reading, the great King David, at the end of his life, reflects on the meaning of kingship, and recalls God's promise that his descendants would reign over Israel for ever.

- **Psalm:** Psalm 132.1-12 - "LORD, remember David".

Psalm 132 is a royal psalm.

It recalls and celebrates how King David had had the Ark of the Covenant brought to Jerusalem, intending to have a temple built there to house it.

The psalm also recalls the *promise* that God had made to David, that his descendants would always reign over Israel. In this regard, the psalm ties in with today's Old Testament reading.

The name "Efrathah", which we encounter in this psalm, is another name for Bethlehem, David's birthplace.

- **Letter Reading:** Revelation 1.4-8 - "The ruler of the kings of the earth"

This reading is part of the introduction to the book.

The purpose of the book was to give encouragement and hope to people in seven congregations in Asia Minor, whose members were experiencing persecution.

Today's reading speaks of the authority of the crucified, risen, and ascended Jesus.

- **Gospel Reading:** John 18.28-37 - "Are you the king of the Jews?"

This reading is part of John's account of Jesus' interrogation by Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea and Samaria.

The Jewish chief priests have accused Jesus of claiming to be the "Messiah", or as Gentiles say, the "king of the Jews". Pilate is interrogating Jesus to determine if this accusation is true.

HYMN: Come, let us worship Jesus

SERMON: “Jesus, King”

Last year on this Sunday, the Gospel reading was the famous passage in which Jesus speaks of the judgement of the nations at the end of the age, in which he himself will be King and Judge. It’s the kind of passage that one would expect for Christ the King Sunday — the Sunday on which we affirm and celebrate the kingship of Jesus. It’s a passage in which Jesus is portrayed as being in a position of not just *great* authority and power, but *ultimate* authority and power.

In comparison, the Gospel reading for Christ the King Sunday this year seems at first like an odd choice. It too depicts a trial, except that it’s Jesus himself who is being tried. The Jewish authorities have had him arrested, and now bring him before Pontius Pilate, the Roman military governor of Judea and Samaria. Wanting Jesus to be given the death penalty, they accuse him of claiming to be the Messiah — the long-awaited king of Israel who would liberate Israel from foreign domination, and make it an independent and prosperous country, just as it had been in the good old days of King David. The chief priests know that such a person would not be tolerated by the Romans, and therefore hope that the Romans will put Jesus to death.

Jesus doesn’t look much like a king in this scene. Presumably, his hands are tied, and he’s accompanied by a couple of burly guards. He appears before the most powerful person in Judea, a man who represents the authority of the Roman Emperor; a man who wields the power of life and death.

So Pilate questions Jesus, to find out if the accusation against him is true. He doesn’t use the term “Messiah”, though; rather, like other Gentiles in the Gospels, he prefers the term “king of the Jews” — that’s a term that makes sense to him. And so he begins by asking Jesus, *Are you the king of the Jews?* (John 18.33).

In the Synoptic accounts of this trial — those in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke — this scene is relatively brief, and Jesus says only one thing in reply: *You have said so* (Matthew 27.11; Mark 15.2; Luke 23.23). That’s all he says.

Here in John’s Gospel, though, the scene is much longer, and Jesus says more than just that. He actually engages Pilate in conversation. After first parrying with a question of his own, Jesus offers Pilate this explanation: *My kingdom is not from this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now, my kingdom is not from here* (John 18.36).

Pilate, sensing that there may be truth to the accusation against Jesus, then asks, *You are a king, then?* (John 18.37). And Jesus explains further: *You say that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me* (John 18.37). And that’s all the explanation Pilate gets.

For our purposes today, on Christ the King Sunday, the thing that's significant about this passage is not what Pilate understood Jesus to mean, or how the trial turned out, but rather, what Jesus says about his kingship.

He says two things. First, he says, *My kingdom is not from this world and my kingdom is not from here* (John 18.36). Some English versions of the Bible say "not of this world", but "from" is a better translation of the Greek preposition: "not *from* this world". What Jesus means is that his kingdom has its origin elsewhere — that is, with God — and that his kingship is different from what Pilate probably understands the term to mean. What Jesus says here sounds very similar to what he said to a crowd in Jerusalem back in Chapter 8 of John's Gospel: *You are from below; I am from above. You are from this world; I am not from this world* (John 8.23). Throughout John's Gospel, Jesus repeatedly says that he has come from the Father, and that the Father has sent him into the world. It's not surprising, then, that he would say that his kingdom was "not from this world".

The second thing that Jesus says is that he has come into the world *to testify to the truth*, and that *everyone on the side of the truth listens to [him]* (John 18.37). "Truth" is an important word in the Gospel of John. In his Prologue to the Gospel, John says of Jesus, *We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son who came from the Father, full of grace and truth* (John 1.14). Later in the Gospel, Jesus says to people who believe in him, *If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free* (John 8.31-32). And later again, he utters these famous words: *I am the way, the truth, and the life* (John 14.6). His mission, then, was to speak God's truth, and to gather a community of those who accept the truth.

Even though Jesus doesn't look very regal in this trial scene, he nevertheless has something of a regal bearing about him. He isn't intimidated by Pilate, nor does he protest his innocence. Rather, he calmly answers Pilate's questions, and does so in that ambiguous way that is so typical of his teaching in John's Gospel.

Earlier, I used the term "Messiah". The concept of the "Messiah" that existed in First-Century Israel has its origin in passages like today's Old Testament reading and today's psalm. Both of these passages refer back to a promise that God had made to King David early in his reign — a promise that Israel would always be governed by descendants of his. The psalm expresses it this way:

*The LORD swore an oath to David,
a sure oath he will not revoke:
"One of your own descendants
I will place on your throne.
If your sons keep my covenant
and the statutes I teach them,
then their sons will sit on your throne
for ever and ever."* (Psalm 132.11-12)

Remarkably, that promise held for nearly four hundred years, until the Babylonian conquest and exile in the 500s B.C. David's dynasty came to an end at that point. Although the people who had been taken into exile by the Babylonians were eventually allowed to return to the land of promise, Israel did not regain its independence, and was no longer ruled by descendants of David. Even when Israel did briefly regain its independence in the Second Century B.C., it was ruled by a family other than that of David. Then, Israel was annexed by the Roman Empire, a situation that continued to the time of Jesus, and beyond.

During this whole period, then, because of the promise God had made to David, the people of Israel looked forward to the re-establishment of David's dynasty. They referred to king they looked forward to as the "Messiah", which means simply the "anointed one". In the First Century A.D., then, the people of Israel looked for the Messiah to come and free Israel from Roman rule — that is, to be essentially a "David II".

The New Testament testifies that Jesus is the Messiah that Israel was waiting for — except that Jesus re-defined the Messiah's "job description". Rather than being a king in the traditional sense of the word, and rather than being the king of just Israel, Jesus' purpose was to bring about a new relationship between God and the people of Israel; and to reach beyond the people of Israel to the rest of the world, to draw them into relationship with God, as well.

Following Jesus' crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension, his followers looked for him to return from heaven, and to establish God's kingdom in the world — and to do so soon. This is the view of Jesus that is expressed in the Book of Revelation.

The Book of Revelation was written in response to a crisis that Christian congregations in Asia Minor were experiencing. During the reign of the Roman Emperor Domitian, in the final decade of the First Century, government officials in Asia Minor were requiring citizens to offer sacrifices to the Emperor, and to worship him as "Lord and God". Christians found this highly offensive, and refused to participate in such sacrifices. Their pagan neighbors therefore regarded those Christians as unpatriotic, disloyal, and even "atheistic"; and government officials subjected them to persecution — imprisonment, and even death.

The Book of Revelation thus was written to encourage those persecuted Christians to remain loyal to God, by showing them the bigger picture: that the government of the Roman Empire was actually satanic, and that it would soon be overthrown by God at Jesus' second coming. Those who had remained faithful to God through the persecution would be vindicated, and their persecutors and all who opposed God would be destroyed. That, in a nutshell, is the message of the Book of Revelation.

So, in today's reading, from the beginning of the book, Jesus is portrayed as a person of ultimate authority and power, who is poised to return to the earth, and establish God's kingdom there. The writer refers to him as *the faithful witness*, referring to his earthly ministry of preaching and teaching; *the firstborn of the dead*, referring to his resurrection; and *the ruler of the kings of the earth*, referring to his all-surpassing authority (Revelation 1.5).

It's quite a contrast to the picture of Jesus that we see in today's Gospel reading, isn't it? In the Gospel reading, Jesus willingly submits to the authority of the Roman Empire, whereas in the reading from Revelation, Jesus is poised to overthrow the Roman Empire.

We're so used to seeing Jesus as a person of the past that we're apt to forget that he's also a person of the present, as well as a person of the future — and Christ the King Sunday serves to remind us of that. The fact that Jesus was raised from death means that he is still alive today. The fact that he ascended to heaven means that he has returned to his original position of authority and power. In his Letter to the Philippians, the apostle Paul puts it this way:

*God exalted [Jesus] to the highest place,
 and gave him the name that is above every name,
 that, at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow,
 in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth,
 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,
 to the glory of God the Father.* (Philippians 2.9-11)

Obviously, not everyone in the world today accepts Jesus' authority. And even we who believe in him accept his authority only partially and imperfectly.

The message of Christ the King Sunday, then, is two-fold.

First, it challenges us to accept Jesus' authority fully — in our individual lives, in our families, and in the church. Rather than seeing Jesus just as a wise person from the past, we need to see him as someone to whom we are accountable for the way we live and the way in which we treat the people around us. We need to take his teaching seriously, and to strive to apply it in our everyday living. In this respect, the message of Christ the King Sunday is one that confronts and challenges us.

Second, the message of Christ the King Sunday is one of reassurance. It reassures us that the powers in the world that are opposed to God do not have the last word, and will not last. Although God tolerates opposition for now, he will not tolerate it indefinitely. It's a hopeful message, then, just as the Book of Revelation was a hopeful message to beleaguered Christians in Asia Minor at the end of the First Century.

Let us acknowledge the kingship of Jesus, then. Let us acknowledge his authority in our own lives, as well as his authority over the world as a whole.

HYMN: Jesus shall reign where'er the sun ...

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE:

God of power and love:

On this Christ-the-King Sunday, we praise you for elevating Jesus to a position of great authori-

ty and power, and for giving him titles that are greater than any other: “Messiah” and “Lord”. Help us to think of him not just as a person who lived long ago, and then died; but also as one who was raised from death, who ascended to heaven, who reigns in heaven with you and the Holy Spirit, and who will one day come back from heaven to complete the task of establishing your kingdom here on earth. As we celebrate Jesus’ kingship today, help us in our struggle against our inclinations to deny his kingship in our lives and give in to our self-centered desires. With the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit, may we continually make progress in accepting Jesus’ authority over us, and in living in the ways he has taught us.

We pray that your church as a whole also may continually recognize the kingship of Jesus, and be faithful to the mission he has given us. May the church share his love and compassion for those who are lost, those who are hurting, and those who are in need. May the church testify to your righteousness, love, and compassion, and seek to be an influence for good in the world. Today we pray in particular for the Child Protection Worker program in Malawi, which we help to support through our givings to PWS&D, that it may provide support for children who suffer abuse, and help to create healthy family relationships.

Hear our prayers for members of our congregation, our families, and our circles of friends who are experiencing difficulties of various kinds — in particular, Marg and Garry Clark and family, Rob McPherson’s brother Sean, who is in hospital in Carman, and others whom we name before you, now, in silence: _____. Gracious God, grant your comfort, strength, encouragement, or healing to each one, according to their situation and their needs. May they be assured of your presence and your love, and may they feel your support.

We pray also for the needs of the wider world. As we reflect on the kingship of Jesus today, we pray for people in positions of authority at all levels in our society, that they may be guided to exercise their authority fairly and responsibly, and not just use it for their own ends. Grant them wisdom also, so that their decisions may be made with consideration for the way in which they will affect others, and for what their long-term consequences may be.

We pray in particular today for people in British Columbia who have been affected by this past week’s disastrous landslides and floods. Grant your blessing and strength to those who have lost a loved one; those who have been forced out of their homes or businesses, or off of their farms; those who are physically cut off from the rest of the province; those struggling to prevent further flooding; those coordinating the relief effort; those providing food, shelter, and other assistance; those striving to feed or rescue their farm animals and those who have lost farm animals; and those starting the work of rebuilding washed-out roads, bridges, and rail lines; as well as those *less*-directly affected, but still dealing with shortages and other challenges. Guide the provincial and federal governments in responding to this crisis, we pray; and grant that each one affected may receive the support and assistance they need.

We pray for your guidance as governments deal with the persistent problem of drug abuse, particularly as the numbers of deaths from overdoses increase. Since the law-enforcement approach doesn’t seem to be working, grant imagination and creativity to those seeking to deal with the issue more effectively.

And we continue to pray about the pandemic. Today we give thanks that a vaccine for children

five and up has just been approved. We pray that it may be quickly made available, and that large numbers of children may receive it. We pray also for doctors and other health care workers who have been harassed or threatened for their involvement in the vaccination program — that the risk to their well-being may be taken seriously, and that they may receive the protection they need.

We thank you that you hear our prayers, gracious God, and we offer them up to you in the name of Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

OFFERING

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING AND DEDICATION:

Loving and generous God:

We present these offerings to you in gratitude for your love and for the blessings by which you sustain and enrich us. We do so also in the hope that the reign of Jesus may increasingly become evident in our lives, the church, and the world.

Equip your church to be a sign to the world of the reign of Jesus, we pray; and use our offerings to strengthen its ministry and mission.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

HYMN: Rejoice, the Lord is King!

COMMISSIONING AND BLESSING:

Sisters and brothers in Christ:

Go into the week ahead, now,
in peace,

and in the strength of the Holy Spirit,
to continue living as citizens of the kingdom of God,
and recognizing the authority of Jesus.

And may God bless you:

May he inspire and strengthen you each day,
and may he give you joy in living in his ways;
in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.