

“Reign of Love”

John 18;33-37

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From the Pulpit

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John 18:33-37

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Let us pray: O God of Love, open our hearts to receive Your love this day through Your Living Word. And may the words that I have to offer, here, this morning, please You and honor You and glorify Your holy name. In Jesus’ name, we pray, Amen.

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On this Sunday, the Sunday **before** Thanksgiving, during **this** time of year when we *all* become more intentional about expressing our gratitude ... I give thanks for all of YOU: for your deep commitment *and* your faithfulness *and* your resilience!

As many of you will recall, it has been over 25 years since our congregation has experienced an *interim* time; that is, a transitional time in pastoral leadership (of the senior minister role).

And what I have noticed during these last several weeks is that you – as a congregation – remain deeply committed and very supportive and actively engaged in the *work of the church* that we are called to do – together!

YOU. ARE. THE. CHURCH – *and* you are an inspiration!

And you continue to inspire me as we all prepare for the arrival next month of the Rev. Becky David who will serve as our **intentional interim senior minister**.

As you may have noticed, by now, this Sunday – on the liturgical calendar – is referred to as the **REIGN OF CHRIST SUNDAY**. (Traditionally, it is known as *Christ the King* Sunday.)

This REIGN of CHRIST Sunday marks the final Sunday of the current liturgical calendar year as we prepare to **pivot** and enter into *the new year* of our worship calendar which begins **next Sunday** on the first Sunday of Advent.

And so, it is on this day – this *Reign of Christ* Sunday – that we are affirmed and we are challenged and we are reminded that the ultimate standard by which we are:

- to live our lives;
- and relate to one another;
- **and** engage with the wider community;

is *not* the way of the world – or of our **own** socio-political constructs.

Rather, it is that of God – and the Way of Jesus – that we are called to be faithful and engaged and active participants in the Reign of Christ.

Now, having said all of that, I do want to acknowledge that we are currently living through some especially divisive sociopolitical times.

These past few weeks (really, these past several months of this presidential election year) have been difficult for many of us for various reasons.

The national news – as is often the case – has been disturbing and disruptive.

And the various communities of which we are a part (our families, neighborhoods and workplaces) are often divided along political and ideological lines.

I mean – later this week – in just days from now – many of us will gather together with our loved ones for Thanksgiving. And there will be plenty of delicious food and tasty appetizers and hopefully, some pumpkin pie, *and* ... there may also be some topics that we dare not bring up because there is just too much tension there – right now – and the possibility for significant conflict.

However, as Christians and as followers of Jesus, we are called *not* to **avoid** that tension but to learn how to live **in** that tension – **with** each other in faith and in love and in covenant **with** one another – **that we might be** an example of the KIN-dom of God, here on earth, as it is in heaven.

Scripture reminds us of this TRUTH in different ways over and over again.

And we only have to look as far as today's Gospel reading (Jn. 18:37) where Jesus says,

Everyone who belongs to THE TRUTH listens to my voice.

Everyone who belongs to THE TRUTH listens to my voice.

During these past couple of weeks, this passage from John 18 has had me reflecting on the **meaning** of the word, *TRUTH*, and I was reminded just how subjective and contextual **TRUTH** can be.

And so, in this short story from John (just 5 verses), we are given a word for word account of this highly charged conversation – a confrontation, if you will, between Pilate and Jesus which was precipitated by Pilate's question to Jesus when he asked him, *“Are you the King of the Jews?”*

The underlying tension in that moment is palpable!

For Pilate, this is a matter of power and politics and control. He is trying to determine, here, if Jesus is now the king of the Jewish nation.

Clearly, Pilate is insecure and envious and feels threatened by the large following and the growing influence of Jesus.

And Pilate is also limited in his understanding of the words, 'king' and 'kingship' and 'kingdom.'

He only understands these words in earthly terms.

Nevertheless, Jesus, always the teacher, responds to Pilate with words of truth which are certainly words that are meant for further reflection and contemplation for Pilate, then, and *still* for all of us today.

Jesus said, “My kingdom is not from this world; my kingdom is not from here ...”

And then he goes on to say, “For this I was born, and for this, I came into this world, to testify to the truth” which is this:

“Everyone who *belongs TO the truth* listens to my voice.”

Again, Jesus said, “Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.”

Through this pericope, Jesus re-defines and re-arranges and re-orders our thinking in the way that only Jesus can do, when He gives us this NEW understanding of the concept of TRUTH.

It is here that Jesus establishes that THE TRUTH is not something that *anyone* or any **congregation** or **faith tradition** can possess as our own but rather ...

it is through the TRUTH of Jesus or the Way of Jesus or the reign of Christ that a new upside-down KIN-DOM of God is formed!

And it is through this new identity – this new way of being -- and this new community in and through Christ – that we find our TRUEST BELONGING *and* purpose as followers of the Way.

And so, it is on this day, this Reign of Christ Sunday, that we are reminded and affirmed and challenged to:

- renew our commitments;
- reorder our priorities;
- and to reimagine our relationships.

But how? How do we do that?

How do we move in that direction given our current political tension of today when the divides are so deep, and the conflict is palpable?

Well, of course, there are no **easy** answers, but I’ll leave you with some powerful words, some prophetic words, that have encouraged me.

These are words that were written by the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. – some of the very words that inspired his notion and his dream of what he described as the **Beloved Community**.

Dr. King integrated this theme of the **Beloved Community** into his speeches and his sermons and his writing.

His concept of the **Beloved Community** also describes what I interpret as the Reign of Christ or the Reign of Love.

And so, I'd like to close this morning with words from an essay that Dr. King wrote back in 1956 called: "*Facing the Challenge of a New Year.*"

He wrote:

But the end is reconciliation; the end is redemption.

the end is the creation of a beloved community.

It is this type of spirit and this type of love that can transform opposers into friends.

It is this kind of understanding and goodwill that will transform the deep gloom of the old age into the exuberant gladness of the new age.

It is this love which will bring about miracles.

Thanks be to God for the Reign of Love that is, indeed, present and active in our life together and in our world today! Amen!

