

November 22, 2015 **“Every Eye Shall See Him”**

John 18:33-37;

Revelation 1:4b-8

Second Presbyterian Church, Baltimore

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Revelation 1:4b-8

Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.

To him who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood, and made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Look! He is coming with the clouds; every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and on his account all the tribes of the earth will wail. So it is to be. Amen.

“I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.

John 18:33-37

“Pilate asked him, “So you are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.”

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All of us will one day see the King; Jesus, that is, Lord of All.

How many of us now really want to, or are ready to see him - largely depends on how we see and understand who Jesus is for us.

Part of what we do here on Sunday mornings, weekly recognizing Jesus’ resurrection, is both to praise and learn about the One who we will meet: what is expected of us and valued in us, while we still dwell in these earthly bodies that we won’t have forever.

Part of the reality of the Christian life is that it is hard to be a disciple, to follow Jesus. His is not an example easy to understand, nor easy to truly follow, and we do ourselves a disservice when we say or act like it’s a piece of cake to be a Christian.

Our scripture lessons for us today are a study in contrasts; two ways to look at Jesus the King, from two of the most dramatic and dissimilar Bible stories you could find.

They’re not Thanksgiving texts, but they are just right for this last Sunday in the church year, Christ the King Sunday.

The gospel lesson is of Jesus tried before Pilate; a choreographed exchange between these two men in a chess game of wit and double entendre. John has saved the best of his writing, the most intense detail and dramatic flair, operatic in style, unmatched by any other gospel.

Pilate and Jesus are in a cat and mouse game as the captured but not defeated Jesus stands on trial. Pilate, a two-bit politician out of his league, still gets in some of the best lines.

“So you are a king?” he asks Jesus, who is struggling to stand without a night’s rest, lonely without his friends, soon to be bloodied and beaten by guards.

“What is Truth?” Pilate asks. Now, there’s a question for you.

“I am not a Jew, am I?” he wonders out loud. And you might wonder why he asks such a question.

It is Jesus at his lowest point, his spirit if not his body ready for the cross. “My kingdom is not of this world,” Jesus chokes out at the last, and boy is that the truth, standing there in front of all the trappings of Rome’s power, palace columns, purple robes, guards with breastplates and swords. Pilate’s kingdom *is* of this world and he has the bronze and steel to show for it. Jesus’ kingdom could not be less worldly, and never more so clearly than in this scene.

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The other story for today is a stark contrast, one that comes through a haze that presents an otherworldly quality about it, fit for the big screen.

We are given a strange opening with an apocalyptic feel and triumphant spirit. It is a vision of a time to come when the whole world becomes God’s sanctuary and we’re all gathered together in the temple, worshipping day and night, until suddenly there is a clearing, a break in the clouds.

“Look!” the cry announces. “He is coming with the clouds; every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and on his account all the tribes of the earth will wail.”

There is nothing vulnerable, fainting or defeated about this One who comes in the clouds. The mood couldn’t be more different from the Gospel scene.

This is the triumphant meeting of heaven and earth where the king returns in power and glory, *and every eye shall see him*. It’s the fulfillment of the end of time when God’s reign is established on earth so that his kingdom *is* finally of this world, borne on the wings of the next.

There could not be two more different visions of the royal nature of Jesus. On the one hand, Jesus is broken, beaten, defeated, powerless. On the other, Jesus is triumphant returning in power and glory. All the earth is his *and every eye will see him*.

So, on this Christ the King Sunday, this last of the church year, we mark one final celebration of the Lordship of Jesus Christ with an exclamation point at the end of a year of remembrance and rehearsal.

A year ago we began our waiting in Advent. We celebrated Jesus' birth at Christmastide, we wondered at his glory in Epiphany. We prepared for his passion in Lent.

We shared at table with him on Maundy Thursday and kept a sorrowful watch on Good Friday. On Easter morning, we woke up wondering what happened and celebrated the surprise of the resurrection and victory over death. At Pentecost we marveled at the gift of the Holy Spirit, and on All Saints we remembered that we are part of a holy company gone before us, and others who will come after us, saints in heaven and saints on earth.

We come full circle to mark yet one more time the reign of Christ over all the earth, whose kingdom is not of this world, not yet, but will be one day. Next week we start the journey all over again.

Advent arrives with lit candles and ramped up expectations; but before that, we pause to ponder a Truth; that Christ is Lord of our lives and King over time and all eternity.

We pause and ponder because Christ's reign is very understated much of the time, with Jesus' power not always evident. If Jesus is the Prince of Peace, the Lord of Life, it's often hard to prove it based on what we see. In political terms, we'd have to admit that Jesus exercises more 'Soft Power' than rule with an iron fist; he is more persuasive than coercive, and more invitational than dictatorial.

Our faith in Jesus Christ is a gift to help us bridge the difference between the way things are now and what things will be like in God's kingdom. Our news of the day has moved on from the tempest in the teapot over the color of Starbucks Holiday cups to a deeper question of our values as a people and the content of our character.

The political debate of late rambles on about Syrian refugees, and I have paused and pondered what our Lord might have to share in this conversation. Having been a refugee himself, spirited away from the wrath of King Herod as an infant to Egypt, only to return again to Nazareth when the 'coast was clear', his might be a voice of wisdom *and* experience. How it is we choose to listen to Christ's voice is surely up to us, but *that* we listen to Jesus is part of our common call as Christians; and as I said earlier, it is not easy being a Christian, and we do a disservice to ourselves if we make our faith out to be as easy as pie.

It is hard to be a disciple, to remember what Jesus taught and said and did- and to follow faithfully and consistently, and I guess there are numerous ways to listen, and then forget, or listen and not pay attention, but part of 'being' a Christian might also be letting Jesus pray through our lives, to allow Christ to be part of our 'being' in what we do and say, in how we live and act- as he did himself. And the evidence points to a life filled with mercy, love and hope. Even the angels shared their words to live by: (with their opening line always being: 'fear not'!

So, with the turning of the seasons we turn anew to Jesus.

And we look for the signs of Christ's reign on earth and among us, which surely not every eye has yet seen.

When Christ comes again, maybe there will be no more cynicism, no more party politics and vitriolic posturing; at least there will be no more decisions to send troops into harm's way, because war will be no more. But in the meantime, how do we continue to faithfully look for the signs of the heavenly king's coming?

In the midst of violence in Paris and Beirut, Mali and in our own city, with chronic and tragic regularity, has any eye yet seen his coming?

"Look," John says, "he is coming with the clouds."

Maybe it finally boils down to just how good you believe God is. Whether God means well for us or God means for us ill, and whether God has abandoned his people or whether God has embraced us as his own.

A kind and loving God could never abandon us; a good and gracious God meets us on our way.

In this vast world of indifference, in this city primed with people of good will and ill intent, on this impersonal planet spinning in the vastness of space, we are not without hope. God has come to us and entered our experience, and knows what it is to be who we are.

In Jesus, God did that. And because God has, we are not alone. We are not alone. We never were. We never will be. God will never leave us.

The great jazz musician Miles Davis once said that the secret to playing jazz is not to play the notes that are there, but to play the notes that are *not* there. And maybe that's exactly what we are meant to do on this Christ the King Sunday, play the notes that are not there, see the things that are yet coming into being, notice the signs of his presence that are yet to be made fully manifest; to be the kind of people who live into the promise given us in Christ.

So, as you live in the midst of turmoil & doubt, take courage, for Christ is with us.

Christ came, not so he could be like us, but so we could become like him, and enjoy the beauty of togetherness with God now and forever.

We are not alone, and we are not our own. We are Christ's brothers and sisters, Christ body on earth, together to be filled with his love, to do his will.

The king who was crucified will return triumphant. We have *God's* word on it. So, look up! He is coming with the clouds; and every eye **will** see him. Amen.