

"Some Things Do Not Change." 2 Sam. 23:1-7; Ps. 132; John 18:28-38
Chapel Lane Presbyterian Church
Rev. David E. Young
Christ the King Sunday, November 22, 2009

Believe it or not, today is New Year's Eve. It is Christ the King Sunday, the last Sunday of the Christian Year. Next Sunday is the First Sunday of Advent and with it we begin to hear, all over again, the story of our salvation, this time told from Luke's perspective.

Even though we are starting over after coming full circle, we know things have moved on and we never come back to exactly the same place we were at this time last year.

This is perhaps even more true this year. Consider all that has happened in your own personal life, in our life together as a congregation, our life as a community of men and women, children and youth, all striving to be faithful followers of Jesus Christ, our Lord.

In many ways we are light years away from where we were at this time last year. And yet, in spite of all the changes that have occurred, some things have not and will not change.

The "something" I have in mind is what this day calls us to remember and to celebrate. Jesus Christ is the same: yesterday, today and forever. He is King of kings and Lord of lords. He is in charge.

So, before we rush headlong into the weeks preceding Christmas, it is important to remember who is in charge.

We are not in charge. Madison Avenue is not in charge. All the commercial establishments are not in charge. No one is in charge but

God alone. God is the Lord of Time and of the end of Time. Even our year which is revolving to a close is in the care and keeping of Almighty God.

But, as we proclaim this eternal truth we still find ourselves confronted with the question of who is really in charge and to whom do we owe our allegiance, our obedience and our trust. It comes down to a question of sovereignty. Can we as Christians give our full allegiance to anyone or anything other than Christ?

When Jesus appeared before Pilate, the Roman governor was full of questions. (We are always full of questions, too). Pilate wanted to assess the level of threat that Jesus posed to his power and the power of Caesar. Oh, if he only knew!

"Are you the King of the Jews?" Pilate asked.

Jesus didn't give him a simple "yes" or "no". Instead he answered the question with a question of his own: "Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?" Jesus wanted the "real" Pilate to show up, not the Puppet Pilate. (Jesus wants the "real" us to show up too, not the "me" that I think others will approve of, not the "me" that has always bowed to authority, always done the dutiful thing.)

Pilate's answer tells us where he is coming from. "I'm not a Jew! Your own leaders want you punished. Why is that?"

Jesus spoke again, but with utter disregard for the question. "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were of this world you would have a rebellion on your hands. But, as it is, my kingdom is not from around here."

We can almost see the wheels turning in Pilate's head as he locks in on the word "kingdom" and makes the leap to kingship: "So, you ARE a king!" Finally we are getting somewhere!

Jesus, however, refuses once again to answer Pilate directly other than to say: "You say that I am a king. My kingdom is the kingdom of truth. My citizens are those who belong to the truth."

Frustrated by the interview, or perhaps a bit exasperated and impatient, caught as he is between the demands of the Jewish leaders on the outside and Jesus' calm demeanor here on the inside, Pilate says, "What is truth?"

It's a question that hangs in the air as Pilate goes out to the crowd and attempts to release Jesus, calling him the King of the Jews. But, as we already know, his attempts are futile and the story marches on to the cross, the crucifixion, Jesus' death and burial.

That should have been the end of the story. But if that were all there was to tell, this would be a history lesson rather than a sermon! Instead, what we have is the jumping off point to new life in the Spirit.

Those who belong to the truth, who listen to Jesus' voice, who have listened to the witness of Christians down through the ages, know that God's power is made perfect in weakness. God's strength is stronger than human strength, God's wisdom is wiser than human wisdom. The cross is the means by which our redemption is secured and the kingship of our Lord is ratified.

With the resurrection of Jesus, questions like: "Are you the King?" and "What is Truth?" become bold proclamations. "Are you the King?"

becomes: "He is King of kings. He is Lord of lords. Jesus Christ, the first and last, no one works like him!"

"What is truth?" becomes: "Jesus Christ is the Way, the Truth and the Life!"

As we hear once again the claims of the *Gospel*, we have to chart our own course between the questions raised about who Jesus is and what he means to us and the proclamation that occurs when those questions are answered to our satisfaction and we are able to live them out, not as propositions but as life-transforming truth.

If we belong to Christ and his kingdom then we are called to follow in the steps of our king. As he served the least, so we serve. As he reached out to the lost, so we reach out. As he welcomed all, so do we. As he gave, so too we are called to give ourselves away so that we may find our truest selves, the selves that are made in the image of God, stamped with the image of the king, part of the coin of Christ's realm.

I am glad that today is the day of our Share Fair. It is one way for us to participate in the kingdom of God and practice good citizenship in that kingdom as we give thanks to God and reach beyond ourselves in concern for others.

The clear evidence of Christ's living presence in Christian community is the quality of the love - the self-giving, sacrificial love that members of that community show to one another and to the world. Just as Jesus Christ does not change, neither should this manifestation of his spirit in us ever change.

As we celebrate Thanksgiving later this week and then head into the season of Advent, may we know that, indeed, all will be well, because

the King who has laid claim to us is the Lord of Heaven and Earth, the One who will not let us go and who holds each of us, wherever we may wander and wherever we may be, in the palm of his hand and in the power of his faithful love.

Some things just don't change. Thanks be to God!