

SERMON for the LAST SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

November 22, 2009

2 Samuel 23:1-7

Psalm 132:1-13 (14-19)

Revelation 1:4b-8

John 18:33-37

Today we celebrate the last Sunday after Pentecost, the last Sunday of the Church year, and this Sunday is known as 'Christ the King Sunday'. The Lessons talk about the Reign of Christ as we see in Samuel, Revelations and in John's gospel.

We hear the last words of David in the Oracle of David, son of Jesse; David who was both exalted and anointed by God. In David's Oracle we hear him contrasting the difference between a just and a wicked ruler. The just ruler would be one who fears God and whose household would prosper, while the wicked, godless ruler is like a thorn to be thrown away and consumed with fire. David was revered as the greatest of all the kings of Israel who ruled according to the everlasting covenant made with God that through *him* the Messiah would come and reign for eternity.

As we look back on King David's life, even though he was special in the eyes of God, we will remember that David had committed adultery and was also a murderer, but despite these sins, God still exalted and anointed him. This story gives us hope today, because even when we sin, God does not abandon us but offers forgiveness and reconciliation and uses us to further the Kingdom of God.

The passage in Revelation puts the lordship of God and Christ front and center before us. This passage is also filled with Hope, because the power of the Almighty stands at the beginning and the end of history, and Jesus is seen as the ruler of the kings of the earth. Jesus is the Alpha and the Omega, the one who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty. What more assurance could we be given, that our lives begin and end with Christ.

In John's gospel story, we see a beaten and bleeding Jesus dressed in a purple robe, the color of royalty, but a Jesus who looks nothing like a king. Instead of wearing a golden crown Jesus is wearing a crown of thorns. Pilate is trying desperately to save Jesus, because he does not look like a terrorist and Roman law requires that you have to have a definite accusation in order to punish a prisoner. Pilate keeps asking Jesus if he is the King of the Jews, but Jesus does not answer his question. Instead Jesus replies that he has come into the world to bring a reign of truth, and those who belong to the truth will hear and obey his voice because they can see the nature of God more fully. This is the saving truth that is being offered to the whole world, and is the essential meaning of our being able to proclaim Christ as King.

Each Sunday we gather here to be the Church, and we hear stories about the life of Jesus through the eyes of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. We know that Jesus is the Son of God, who was sent on earth to bridge the gap between God and mankind. We know that Jesus healed the sick, comforted the hurting, performed miracles, lived like a homeless person, and taught his disciples and those around him how to love each other. We also know that Jesus came to set an example of how we should live our lives, and we know that he suffered greatly at the end of his life on earth. We know that Jesus was both human and divine, and that a lot of us can identify with his humanity as we also experience pain. We know that Jesus loves us and wants us to love and care for each other.

But have we ever asked ourselves the question, “Who is Jesus to us? Who is Jesus to you and to me? How do we experience Jesus in our lives every day?” Have we taken Jesus out of all the Bible stories we hear, and invited him into our hearts so that we can have a personal relationship with him?

I struggled with this question for a very long time, because the God of the Bible seemed very far away from me. I believed in God, but I never connected that the God of the Bible would have anything to do with me. I had an experience, oh about 15-20 years ago, when the light bulb suddenly came on and I was able to sum up this experience in something \*I wrote down at that time. I would like to share this with you, and I hope that maybe someone will identify with what I went through.

Even though I have always been to Church, I never thought that God was near to me; my perception of God was that God was far away from me. I wondered how could this God that was so far away care for me as there are so many, many of us to love and care for. Why me, I did not do anything to deserve such love.

It was not until I was a member of another Church that I attended some time ago, that I heard the priest talking about having a personal relationship with God. This priest told us that God loved each and every one of us, and cared about us, and I really started to listen and wanted to hear more about this God who did not seem so far away after all. Of course I have since realized that I was the one who was far away from God, because God is always with us; we are the ones that remove ourselves from God, but I did not understand this at that time.

As I continued to listen to our priest, it all started to make sense to me. I began to realize that that Book on the shelf, you know, the one that every Episcopalian has in their home but most do not read; this Book was suppose to help me to learn and know more about this God that I had held at a distance for so long.

One day while sitting in Church before the Service began, minding my own business, I clearly heard someone say to me, “Follow Me.” Wow, that nearly blew me away, but I wondered what it could mean to me, and it did not take me long to make the decision that I was going to get up off the fence and stop being an observer, and be a participant instead so that I could obey that command.

All I can tell you is that it was one of the best decisions I have made in my life, because the decision to Follow God has changed my life so much. I started going to Bible study, I was hungry for the Word of God and discovered how it could change my life. I realized that God had given me the greatest gift of all, the gift of Jesus Christ, who died for me; me, little insignificant me. I had never looked at it this way before; I never applied it to me personally. When you think about it you realize that we are very special in the eyes of God.

We are on a journey, each day we learn something else, and sometimes doubt creeps in there but that is OK. As we learn more and more each day we come to realize that we are all God's children and that God loves each one of us. This God who seemed very far away from me, I am able to look at as My Savior, My Helper, My Advocate; God gives me the strength to go on day by day, no matter what is happening in my life.

This God that used to be far away from me, is now my God of Here and Now, a God who is very real to me, a God who I can see in everyone's face. And I know there is a lot of work to do so that I can tell others about this God who is very real in my life; so that God can be their God of the Here and Now, and be very real to them. And so the journey continues....

On this Christ the King Sunday, I invite you to ask yourself the question, 'Who is Jesus to me?' Is Jesus near and personal to you, or does he seem far away because we have removed ourselves from Him? What difference will it make to us if we invite Jesus into our lives? As I said earlier, we are here to help each other and it might just take another person to help us answer the question, as it did for me, and it also takes studying and sharing together as we recognize that we are all on this journey, seeking to know Christ, seeking to be a better person, seeking to reach out to others. Know that we are here to help each other and if anyone is interested in belonging to a small group where we can share our doubts and fears, a place where we can talk about our beliefs and unbelief's, where we can study and learn more, please let me know. This is how we grow together in the love of Christ; it does not have to be a lonely journey.

The disciples had each other to share their doubts and fears and even though they did not always 'get it' when Jesus was alive, after Jesus' death they became a tight-knit community and were closer and active in their ministry to spread the word about Jesus.

Remember that Christ the King is with each of us; Christ the King still rules; Christ the King calls us to be in this world but not to be of this world; we are to put our faith and hope in things eternal. Christ the King is still reaching out and calling us to him; Christ the King wants us to love each other as he loves us.

There is a hymn that I used to sing when I was a little girl in boarding school, I do not remember the opening sentence, but the refrain says, 'Come into my heart Lord Jesus, there is room in my heart for you.'

Jesus wants to hear each of us say that, Jesus is beckoning for us to know who he is and how our lives can be changed so that we can be closer to God. Who is Jesus to you? Will you invite him into your hearts today?

God Bless us all.

Amen

### **\*The God of Far Away**

*The God of today was once very far away  
In my mind's eye, He was up there, so far away  
How could He know me and I Him, 'Cos He was so far away.*

*How could this God of Far Away love and care for me  
when there are so many, many of us to love.  
Why me? Why would I deserve such love, I did not do anything.*

*But somehow this God of Far Away, sent someone into my life  
to teach me about Him. And I started to listen, to listen very carefully to how this God of  
Far away, loved and cared for me, and wanted me to know it.*

*The stirrings started, I wanted more, It all started to make sense.  
That Book on the shelf, the one no one read.  
Was to be used  
To learn about this God of Far Away.*

*One day He called me, I heard,  
"Follow Me"  
What could it mean, I did not know,  
I just know, I wanted to go and so I decided to follow Him.  
And oh what joy it has been  
To know that this God of Far Away  
Loved me so much, He sent His Son to die for me.*

*And as I listen and learn  
And know that we are all His children  
That He loves each and every one of us.  
This God of Far Away, is now  
My Friend, my Comforter, my Savior,  
my Helper and my Advisor.*

*The God of Far Away, is now my God of Here and Now.  
And as I revel in God's Grace  
And see God in everyone's face,  
I know that I have work to do  
To bring this God to all I know  
So that He, too, can be their God of Today*