

*2 Samuel 23: 1-7*

*John 18: 33-37*

Today is the last Sunday in this year of the church. Next Sunday we begin anew with Advent, the beginning of our church year. Today is also known as Christ the King, or Reign of Christ Sunday. This particular Sunday is an interesting day in the life of the church. A day to reflect on the church year, not only in the past, but also moving forward.

To be quite honest, it's an odd time to be thinking about endings and reflecting on the life of the church in the past year when everything else in our lives seems to be focused on new beginnings. We are in the midst of holiday season planning and hustle and bustle. Whether you're last minute getting things ready for Thanksgiving on Thursday, or trying to get a head start on Christmas planning, it's a time of go go go, plan plan plan, and less so about wrapping up the end of a year (unless of course you chair a committee and you're already thinking about the annual review, ha ha).

As I reflect on our scripture passage, I think King David was feeling a bit of this tension as well (though he wasn't planning for Thanksgiving or Christmas). This passage is supposedly his last words to the people of Israel. It is a poem that reflects back to Hannah's song in the beginning of 1 Samuel. Even though these last words are nice, King David is still alive and doing stuff well into 1 Kings chapters 1 and 2. But sticking with the idea of last words and reflecting on the year, let's take a gander through David's kingship.

David's kingship was more than the sweet and reverent Bible stories we hear in Sunday school. Yes, David did great things, but David also did some not so great things. Like all humans, David made mistakes, lost sight of the true Godly goal, and had to deal with the consequences of those mistakes.

Some of David's highlights as King are: bringing the Israelites to Jerusalem and marking that as their capital, bringing the ark of God to Jerusalem, making an everlasting covenant with God, and advising Abiathar and Zadok to keep the ark in Jerusalem when they consider taking it elsewhere. Some of David's not-so-stellar moments are: his affair with Bathsheba which ultimately leads to him killing Uriah, not properly disciplining his son Amnon for his truly horrific actions, and starting battles for his own gain.

Even though David was a very human king, he is still revered as one of Israel's greatest kings that led with righteousness and awe of God. And he left these last words for the people to listen to and live by. David reminds his people that a just and righteous ruler is like sunlight on a cloudless morning. The ruler should be just as nourishing to their people as the sun is nourishing to the ground after rainfall. How nice does that sound?

As I think about David's last words and reflect on David's kingship, I'm left wondering how did the Israelites take this poem? Were they in awe of their king and hanging onto his every word? Were they reflecting on his kingship with a critical eye and thinking about the ways David wasn't nourishing, and thus taking his words with a grain of salt? David even goes on to condemn the godless after confirming that yes, God made an everlasting covenant with him and his people, and that they will prosper from this covenant. If I were an Israelite, I'm not sure I would be taking these last words very kindly or seriously.

For me, it would be like one of the pastors standing up today and saying "My, how wonderful this past year has been! Look at all the good deeds we have done! Look at this money we have raised to help those in need! And all those other people out there who didn't raise money or help the poor and needy are going to hell!" No mention of a global pandemic, no mention of the hardships and grace that was needed this year, just touting the good and honorable things. It's inauthentic and actually quite human.

So I'm left wondering again, what would make these last words more authentic? What could embrace the good and the bad? The remembrance of mistakes and lessons learned alongside the hope of a new day? Honestly, I'm left wondering what Jesus' last words would have been if he were in David's time and place.

And honestly y'all, I know Jesus would've told it like it was. Jesus would have reminded them of their everlasting covenant with God, and lovingly chastised them for their human mistakes of needless war and suffering. Jesus would not have pretended that things were great when they weren't, and would have told them all of this from a place of love and care, unlike David who spoke from human dignity and a need for excellence.

So today, as we think about the end of our church year, as we're caught between this tension of holiday season and prep for Advent, let us remember how Christ has reigned this year and every year. I have only been with you all since August, but some nourishing activity I have witnessed you all do is welcoming people back into the building and worship, forging ahead with mission work whether it was the food rescue at Michigan games or starting a new mission opportunity with the Thanksgiving bags for Hope Clinic, working relentlessly to keep church feeling like church even when we're masked and in hybrid meetings, and so much more. It's pretty clear to see Christ through all of this.

So, what are some of the harder things that have happened this year? Maybe it was a time when committees got snippy with each other and didn't collaborate very well (that definitely hasn't happened already in my time here – ha ha), or maybe a time of transition and grief? With the joy of the new residents coming in also comes the grief of the old ones leaving... I know your interim pastor, Rick Spalding, left earlier this year, as well, after a period of time with you all. In the past year we have redone church traditions, whether going completely online or cancelling, until it was safe to meet again, and everything in between. Guess what, Christ is still reigning during these more difficult times too. Because, fortunately, Christ is our king, not David, not our president, not even our pastors. Christ and Christ alone is king and rules with justice and righteousness. So on this Christ the King Sunday, as we prepare for advent next week and the start of another church year, let us remember where Christ has been this past year, in the good, the bad, and the not so great. And in honor of David's last words, let us go into this next year with justice and righteousness on our hearts and minds. Amen.