

**November 20, 2016 Reign of Christ Sunday**

**Rev. Jen Nagel, University Lutheran Church of Hope**

**Jeremiah 23:1-6, Psalm 46**

**Colossians 1:11-20, Luke 23:33-43**

Karoline Lewis, Working Preacher on 11-13-16 for 11-20-16; Rev. Jane McBride, First Congregational Church, 11-13-16; David Lose.net on 11-14-16; Teje Cole, New York Times Magazine, A Time for Refusal, 11-11-16; We Talk. We Listen blog, "The Road to 270 Was Through the ELCA", Vicar Lenny Duncan, 11-14-16.

**Grace and peace, to you beloved of Christ, from God our refuge and our strength.**

**Some of you have** heard me mention my teenage years spent babysitting each New Year's Eve and those long hours listening to Casey Kasem and the count down of the top hits of the year just passing.

Today is Reign of Christ Sunday, Christ the King Sunday, the new year's eve of the church year.

Next Sunday as Advent begins, we'll start the cycle all over again.

Today, on this new year's eve, we sing through the seasons: Advent then Christmas and Epiphany, Lent leading us to Easter, Pentecost and Holy Trinity and that long green season the season after Pentecost. All Saints Sunday and now Reign of Christ Sunday round out the year.

**Some things in the church** date back to Jesus himself, but this Sunday is a young-un, a newbie, of sorts.

It was 1925, in Benito Mussolini's Italy, when Pope Pius the 11<sup>th</sup> instituted the feast of Christ the King.

Take a minute to let that era, those issues, sink in:

1925, between the wars, and Fascism is at a height with Mussolini's rule.

Why in that time, in that place, did the Pope create this new feast day that we celebrate still?

To remind us that our allegiance is to Christ, to a spiritual ruler, not to an earthly one.

Not in Jesus time, not in the politics and concerns of 1925, not before the election, and not after the election—our allegiance is to Christ's reign, God's reign.

**The timing of this day**, this year, 12 days after the election, is not lost on me, and not on you either, I know.

I need to remember, deeply, in my bones, that Jesus reigns, that's R-E-I-G-N-S, Jesus reigns.

That's a comfort in this crazy, crazy, time, filled with so much emotion on all sides: grief to outrage, hope, determination, stress, melancholy, anger, isolation, and some very real and very physical fear.

On the one hand, Christ reigns and I can breathe more deeply, sleep more easily. God is in charge.

On the other hand, let us not be lulled back into quiet complicity.

This Christ who reigns, this Jesus who is put to death on the cross, is a king in a radical, counter cultural way.

"This is no leader recognizable in our world today," preaching professor Karoline Lewis writes,

"Instead," she goes on, "we acquiesce to leadership that does not reflect biblical principles and does not recognize that *how we lead reveals our theological commitments*."

"We forget...that how we lead"...demonstrates..."who we think God is."

**So, what kind of king do we have? What kind of leader, or, more precisely, what kind of God?**

Luke's gospel walks us through those last days, and the way Christ reigns, the kind of king, becomes clear: As Jesus entered Jerusalem for that last time, Luke tells of how the peasants took off their cloaks and spread them on the road to give Jesus on the colt a royal red-carpet welcome.

Between Luke's 19<sup>th</sup> chapter and the 23<sup>rd</sup> chapter that we hear today, things have shifted:

Jesus is rejected, he's mocked, his very status as the Messiah is questioned.

By today's gospel, it's poignant, isn't it, that Jesus hangs on this cross, this institutional instrument of torture, he hangs between these two men, one still mocking even as they are dying, "Save yourself!", the other figuring out redemption, clear that Jesus is innocent, begging to be saved, remembered, in Jesus' reign.

**So, what kind of king do we have?**

A king, who while he is being crucified, is forgiving his killers, and saving (not condemning, but saving) the one at his side.

**How we lead is an indicator of who we believe God to be.**

This is why Reign of Christ Sunday is so important, **for Christ's authority is love**, the power is in loving, it is a whole new kind of leadership, a new kind of king, one whose authority rises from love:

Love that forgives, love that challenges, love that is mutual and not-coercive, love that speaks our truth and acts out beliefs, love that is diligent, love that is rooted and centered, not bitter and malicious.

**At Standing Rock, we met a woman** named Kate Arrington Silvertooth, a writer, a photographer.

As we talked, she shared with us a picture she had taken of a young Native American man, a water protector, sitting atop his horse as assault vehicles were gathering on the hills all around them.

It is a vivid picture, one that reminds for me what I witnessed in my short time there:

There is a strength in his face, a calmness in his eyes,  
a determined steadiness of his hand, not clenched, but resting, ready, on his horse.

This water protector and his community are centered in prayer, over and over again, when anger rises—and it surely does—they bring each other back to prayer.

**The authority of love.** That's what we're talking about today, this Reign of Christ Sunday.

Jesus, a ruler, a king steeped in vulnerability, leading from a power beyond himself.

**Just days after the election, Nigerian-American writer, Teju Cole** wrote in the New York Times Magazine,

"Evil settles into everyday life when people are unable or unwilling to recognize it.

It makes its home among us when we are keen to minimize it or describe it as something else.”

**It's on us, dear friends**, it's on us to recognize what is happening around us—on campus and in the church, in our homes and at the seats of power, at the Thanksgiving dinner table—oh my, to see it for what it is, to name it, and to bravely, fiercely, tenderly, humbly stand in the authority of love, Christ's reign, Christ's radical, counter cultural reign.

**That's going to take some** uncomfortable conversations, and some deep listening as we come to terms with the pain for some, especially in middle America, especially in more rural areas, especially some white folks, pain that I haven't given enough of a hearing, and yet I must get out of my echo chamber, my bubble, we must, for we need to understand one another more deeply, more truly. And at once, while I need to listen to their pain, I also am pulled by the call for sanctuary churches and even sanctuary cities as safe places for immigrants in need of refuge, I'm hearing the isolation and depression of students, really those of many ages, the micro-aggressions and macro aggression for people of color, for queer folks especially the trans community, for immigrants. I'm thinking about an opportunity we have today after worship to do some sidewalk chalking, denouncing the hate, the violence, the xenophobia, misogyny, the racism, the heterosexism, able-ism articulating, clearly, articulating our values: gospel love, hospitality, dignity. Talk with our Community Engagement Coordinator Nick to join in.

**From our own place at the cross**, next to Jesus, we are called to see it for what it is, to name it, And, again, to bravely, fiercely, tenderly, humbly stand in the authority of love, Christ's radical, counter cultural reign.

With a new kind of ruler comes a new kind of community. With a new king comes a new kind of kingdom. And I don't mean the president elect, I mean the reign of Jesus Christ, the reign of love. May the God of heaven and earth, the God of love, keep you and hold you, inspire and encourage you, in this season and every season. Amen.