

“In Our End Is Our Beginning”

**Presented by Pastor Scott Walters on 11-25-2018
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The first time I ever attended worship in a synagogue was in the month of October. It turns out, it was the celebration of what is called Simkhat Torah. It is a rejoicing in the Torah. Two things mark this celebration. First, at one point during the service, the huge scrolls are paraded through the sanctuary with the Rabbi sharing with anyone else who'd like to help in the carrying of the scrolls. The children all help. And those who don't carry the scrolls often touch them as they came around to where they're standing or sitting.

The other part of the service is that the last Torah reading is read and then continues with the first couple of chapters from the book of Genesis – starting they cycle once again. The symbolism of not finishing with the last words of the book of Deuteronomy, but continuing with the Creation story in Genesis -- that we are never really finished with scripture and that our understanding of the scripture is unfathomable, was so striking to me.

What we celebrate today in Christ the King Sunday is, in some ways, not that much different. Think about it. The Good News of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is a great story that repeats itself each year. The Great Story – The Divine Drama – The Gospel.

Because of this particular story, all time is divided into what happened before, and what happened after. His death breaks down all the differences that hold us at bay from each other – whether racial or national or gender – and brings us together as one people.

That which we commence on the First Sunday of Advent and complete on the Sunday we call Christ the King Sunday, is also one story – the story of Jesus.

Use any of the titles that are offered to Jesus during the course of his life – titles like rabbi, master, Lord, Lamb of God, Son of God, Son of Man – and eventually you will call him by all of his names.

At the end of the story of Jesus we often hear the reference to Jesus as King or as “King of Kings.” Here we think not so much of the earthly Jesus but as Jesus on a throne, given kingly authority, offering the only judgment for which you and I can hope.

I have to tell you that, for me, it is hard to see Jesus as the heavenly judge seated on a throne.

Most of those mental pictures of Jesus on a throne were with the typical symbols of a monarch – sometimes a crown or a scepter or an orb. Sometimes he is pictured more as though he's embarking on a Great Crusade, rather than being the Good Shepherd. Personally, I don't usually picture Jesus as a King on a throne.

As one reads the Gospel accounts of Jesus, we find a Jesus who, if anything, tends to feel more comfortable with sinners and the riff-raff, Jesus eats with those who were deemed not good enough to eat with. Jesus touches lepers and is seen with refugees and the homeless. How many times do we hear from him something about ‘coming not to be served, but to serve’?

Do you remember the climax on Holy Week and Easter morning? He didn't become the Messiah that everyone expected and were told would happen. Jesus didn't come into the halls of Pilate, just as he didn't come out of the tomb on Easter morning with guns blazing or with swords ready to take on all comers to establish yet another kingdom.

No, this Jesus wound up taking a stroll with two of his disciples – and it was only when they broke bread and shared wine together at a table that they recognized who he was.

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This is a king, who whenever he is offered a high position or a place from which he can look down to others, refused and takes the lower position. And by doing so, proves he is “the King that is above all kings.”

To say that Christ is King is to say that his kingdom is not of this world – you can’t find it on a map of Wisconsin – but it is on the map of every human heart, the place toward which all God’s children journey, however lost and detoured they seem to be. Jesus is Lord of all who love him, and as John Wesley would say, even those who don’t.

Even though this world in which we live seems to hide this kingdom of which Jesus spoke and preached, the word from the vision in the book of Revelation today is that Jesus is indeed, king of this world – “the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.”

But here and there, when repentance is preached and forgiveness experienced; when the hungry are fed, and the homeless housed, we glimpse what will One Day be for all. That End is the beginning of our faith.

Each Sunday, each season, each year, we proclaim this kingdom as our starting point; this promise as the basis of our worship – the invitation to sing, to pray, to receive and give. Today’s scripture from Revelation offers the term we use at our funeral services: the Alpha and the Omega” which is a poetic way of saying “I am the A to Z.” I am the creator of all things and will outlast all things.

Living at the end: whether it is the end of our lives or at the end of the Church year, it’s a matter of living faithfully and hopefully even when there could be reason – good reason – for despair.

As one person put it, we are not optimists; we are Christians. We are not in denial; we are children of hope. It’s a matter of looking into the darkness and singing even more joyfully.

In our end is our beginning; in our time infinity;

In our doubt there is believing; in our life, eternity.

In our death a resurrection; at the last, a victory,

Unrevealed until its season, something God alone can see.

Amen.