

“Dwellings: Love”
Revelation 1.4b-8

Each year when we come to this Sunday in the church year—Reign of Christ/Christ the King Sunday, I find it challenging to focus on a theme for the message. I think it’s partly because I’m never quite sure how to articulate just what Christ the King means. Since we don’t have a government ruled by a king, I don’t think we can fully comprehend the meaning of Christ as King. Plus it always seems to me a little patriarchal, and I sometimes get a little touchy about that sort of thing. As a female in a vocation traditionally viewed as masculine, which still sometimes becomes an issue even after 50+ years of women’s ordination in the Methodist Church. I admit, I may be a little oversensitive on this particular subject, but it’s one reason I tend to find preaching on this day a little more difficult than usual.

This year, however, as we end the liturgical year and look ahead next week to the first Sunday of Advent, I feel a bit more focused. We’re also finishing our sermon series on “Dwellings,” today, and recognizing where we’ve been this past month was helpful. Hope, Victory, Confidence, and then, today, “Dwelling in Love,” prompted me to look back and reflect on the ways in which we have shown love this past year; both to one another and to the community.

Loving one another, and extending that love beyond the boundaries of our church walls, is what we are commissioned to do as disciples of Jesus Christ. And with Jesus as our model, it really is pretty clear what dwelling in love looks like.

For us, specifically, it looks like sending cards to let someone know we’re thinking of them and praying for them. It looks like providing transportation to an appointment, or taking a hot meal to a hurting family. It also looks like collecting hats and mittens, stocking Hillsdale CARES shelves with green beans, and filling cleaning buckets for UMCOR. It looks like cleaning sweeping out cobwebs and replacing light bulbs, it looks like playing the piano or the organ, and it looks like a long prayer list pulled out daily.

The point is, as I was reminded at our clergy retreat this year, every member is a minister. Every one of us has some gift to use and some task to do, because every one of us, as a disciple, serves Christ the King. Remember I confessed I had a problem using that royal term, “King?” I realized, as I was contemplating what this Sunday celebrates, that the language we use as Christians is servant/king language—because we are, all of us, servant leaders under King Jesus. We do our serving as a response to the love God has shown us through God’s love-gift to us, in the form of his son, Jesus the Christ.

The Rev. Dr. Heather Heinzman Lear mentioned in her sermon notes this week that sometimes we don’t understand why such bad things happen to such good people. Every day we hear about a new tragedy; fires burning out of control, with elderly people sleeping and unaware of the danger. Devastating illnesses strike the most vital people; violence claims innocent children.

Rev. Lear comments, “We worship a God who could forgive his executioners and minister to the thief on the cross next to him, while suffering his own unimaginable death on a cross.”¹ It doesn’t make sense to us, then, that this same God would cause any of us to suffer—we just know that isn’t the way God works. I agree with Lear’s conclusion: “Sometimes, terrible things just happen. Yet, Christ our King is right there with us and has committed to be in solidarity with our suffering.”²

Sometimes, when I am called on to be a pastoral presence in the midst of a family’s grief, all I can say is that we are never alone; we may never know or understand why tragedies happen or suffering continues, but truly even when it may not seem like it, God loves us more than we can imagine. Things happen and life isn’t always fair (whatever that means!). And believe me, I’ve questioned why bad things happen more times than I can count; more than once I’ve uttered the words, ‘How long, O Lord?’”

Let’s take a closer look at our text from Revelation this morning—did you notice there are two “amens” sort of hidden in the verses? They don’t conclude a passage, but emphasize the sentence that precedes it: so be it. “To the one who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood, who made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father—to him be glory and power forever and always...[So be it.] And then, “Look, he is coming with the clouds! Every eye will see him, including those who pierced him, and all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of him. This is so. [So be it.] (Rev. 1.6-7)

So be it—despite horrific headlines and terrible tragedies and personal crises, that’s the way it is, and though we don’t like it, and may feel like stomping our feet and running the opposite direction, we are called to love like Jesus. If we claim Jesus as King and Lord of our lives, we are compelled to follow him, loving as Jesus loves.

“We have a God and King whose primary characteristic and value is love. We have a King who created humankind in God’s image and called us ‘very good.’ We have a King who knows our pain, walked in our shoes, and showed us how to really love and be part of God’s Kingdom, even when it’s really hard and unpopular. We have a King who walks with us now and promised to one day wipe away every tear, make all things new, and restore and redeem all of Creation.”³ What a wonderful promise, and we wait in hopeful expectation for that promise to be fulfilled!

And always, we are reminded that as we wait—both for the birth of the baby, as we begin the season of Advent next Sunday, and for Christ’s return, there is much work to do. And, again, as I was reminded at the clergy retreat a week ago, it is you, the people in the pews, who do the majority of the work. You are the ones who are in the bleachers, at the grocery store, in the Bellstore and the Village Point Parlor. You are the ones catching up at the post office and chatting at the gas station. You are the ones sitting around the Sunday School table lifting the prayers of the people. You are and will be Christ’s witnesses in the world. That’s something to

¹ (Lear 2018)

² (Lear 2018)

³ (Lear 2018)

celebrate, especially at the end of one year and as we look ahead to the coming year. Celebrate all the ways we've carried Christ out into the world, and anticipate opportunities to do even more in the future.

We look forward with great joy to the birth of baby Jesus, as we look toward the first Sunday of Advent, next week. And yet, we also know there is still much work to be done. The conclusion of a year seems like an appropriate time to reflect and evaluate, to celebrate our successes and analyze the less-than-successful attempts. And then we begin to plan new ways to honor and serve Christ the King—Christ *our* King. As we say in the Emmaus community, Christ is counting on us! Christ is counting on us to continue his mission of love, whatever it looks like for Lakefork and Hayesville United Methodist churches. As we close out our church year today, may we remain focused on dwelling in love, serving Christ the King, and spreading the Good News of Jesus Christ. Let's cling to the promise of God-with-us, as we hear our scripture one more time, this time from *The Message* paraphrase:

Revelation 1:4-8 The Message

⁴⁻⁷ I, John, am writing this to the seven churches in Asia province: All the best to you from THE GOD WHO IS, THE GOD WHO WAS, AND THE GOD ABOUT TO ARRIVE, and from the Seven Spirits assembled before his throne, and from Jesus Christ—Loyal Witness, Firstborn from the dead, Ruler of all earthly kings.

Glory and strength to Christ, who loves us,
who blood-washed our sins from our lives,
Who made us a Kingdom, Priests for his Father,
forever—and yes, he's on his way!
Riding the clouds, he'll be seen by every eye,
those who mocked and killed him will see him,
People from all nations and all times
will tear their clothes in lament.
Oh, Yes.

⁸ The Master declares, "I'm A to Z. I'm THE GOD WHO IS, THE GOD WHO WAS, AND THE GOD ABOUT TO ARRIVE. I'm the Sovereign-Strong."

Amen.

Works Cited

Lear, Heather Heinzman. "Season after Pentecost 2018." *Discipleship Ministries*. 11 4, 2018. https://gbod-assets.s3.amazonaws.com/legacy/kintera-files/worsip/Nove18_Dwellings-Worship-Series.pdf (accessed 10 15, 2018).