

The Whole Enchilada

Revelation 1:4b-8

John 18:33-37

November 25, 2012

Bloomfield Presbyterian Church on the Green

Today is the last Sunday on the church calendar. The church's new year begins on the first Sunday of Advent, so when I see you next week I will confuse you by saying, "Happy New Year!" and asking for your new year's resolutions.

Today is the last Sunday of the old year, and it goes by the name, "Christ the King." If the church year were a symphony, today would be the grand finale. Recapitulating the themes of Advent, Ordinary Time, Lent, Holy Week, Easter, Pentecost, Trinity, and All Saints Day, we celebrate the whole Christ event from start to finish, ***the whole enchilada***, from Alpha to Omega. We crown him in song and declare him to be our King.

I gather you've had quite a year here at the Bloomfield Presbyterian Church on the Green. While your beloved sanctuary has been "leaning on the everlasting arms" of the Imhoff scaffolding, you have been leaning on the amazing grace of God to overcome a setback or two and maintain your vital ministries of compassion to the community. When you found yourselves without pastoral leadership, one of your own stepped forward saying, "Here I am, Lord, send me." Bruce Arlett filled your pulpit, and through him, God blessed you with the heartfelt words not of a professional but of a friend.

Even so, things got confusing. You quarreled some. You got on each others' nerves, some. The Pastor Nominating Committee met. And met. And met. The rest of you waited. And waited. And waited. There were medical emergencies. Financial concerns. And a wedding! Then Superstorm Sandy hurtled through town the very same week that a certain envelope was supposed to arrive in each of your mailboxes announcing a certain candidate for the position of Designated Pastor. That would be me. Which brings us to today.

Can we say that God through Christ has sustained you these past twelve months? Can we say that God through Christ has brought us together? Can we say that your ministry and witness have been to the glory and praise of Christ even through difficult times?

Yes. I think we can say those things. And by saying them, we are making the case that, yes, Christ is King. Christ is *King*, and, even more importantly, Christ is *our King*. And, even more importantly, Christ is *our King in his own kind of way*.

* * * * *

"Are you the King of the Jews?" Pontius Pilate asked Jesus in today's Gospel reading from John. It was not a sincere question, but a bully's attempt to trap Jesus into saying something he didn't mean.

"My kingdom is not from this world," Jesus replied. "My kingdom is not from here."

"So you are a king?" demanded Pilate.

"You say that I am a king," replied Jesus.

And that is the closest Jesus ever got to claiming for himself the title that we in the church bestow on him almost without thinking. In our Christmas hymns, we hail the newborn king. On Palm Sunday, we sing "Ride On, King Jesus," and at Easter we sing our alleluias to the "King of Kings and Lord of Lords".

The early church coopted one of Caesar's honorary titles and applied it to Jesus, calling him (in today's reading from Revelation Chapter 1) "the ruler of the kings of the earth." Jesus never used this title for himself. The Chief Priests and Scribes got Jesus arrested on charges of sedition, claiming that he called himself "King of the Jews," but he never did call himself king of anything.

"My kingdom is not of this world," is all Jesus ever said on that subject. "My kingdom is not from here."

They dressed him up in mock robes, they shoved a crown of thorns on his head, they taunted him, flogged him, and crucified him on the false charge that he claimed to be "King of the Jews." He did not.

He did not claim to be king of anything or anybody. Instead he spent his life proclaiming *God's kingdom*. He announced the truth that God's kingdom was at hand. He described God's kingdom in terms of a compassionate community. He demonstrated God's kingdom the way you do, herer at the Bloomfield Presbyterian Church on the Green: by reaching out to those who struggle to get by, to make ends meet, or to fit in.

He did not claim to be king of anything or anybody. He did not come to be served, but to serve. He eschewed throne and crown, choosing instead the dishonor of the cross. He suffered. He died. All of this is what he meant when he said, "My kingdom is not of this world."

It's as if Jesus were saying: My way of being king is not like any way of being king you have ever seen before. If you call me King, it must according to my definition. I am a king who kneels to wash his foolish disciples' feet. I am a king with no place to call home, who eats with sinners, who says unpopular things, who will not use violence or threats of violence to get what I want. I am a king who will die for his subjects. And I do not call them subjects, I call them friends.

I am a king whose power is made perfect in weakness. I am a king insofar as I am a faithful witness to God's loving kindness. I am a king insofar as I advocate for God's justice. The laws of my kingdom are that the first shall be last, that the meek shall inherit the earth, that each of you should turn the other cheek and go the second mile

and forgive your brothers and sisters seventy times seven times, bearing one another's burdens, speaking the truth in love, and advertising this upside down gospel to everyone you meet through your words and your deeds, with your money and your time, and in your demeanor—so that God's great love may be seen in all that you are and all that you do.

Christ is King in his own way.

And we have a choice. We can pledge our allegiance to him above all others. Or not. We can pledge allegiance to the cross, and to the Church with a capital C. Or not. Life in the Kingdom is entirely optional.

We can live as if everything that Jesus said and did reveals the very heart of God and has ultimate significance. Or we can live as if does not. We can live according to the rules of engagement of 21st century American social norms, or we can live in a Kingdom that is not "of this world" and not "from here."

We have a choice.

* * * * *

In case you didn't notice, the holidays have already begun. Thoroughfares have been hung with Christmas lights since the middle of November. Some of our neighbors here in the center of town have their wreaths and garlands up already! The quiet gratitude of Thanksgiving has already made way for the mad dash of Black Friday shopping. And how many shopping days are left until Christmas? Does anybody know?

Let's remember who is King this holiday season. And let's remember that we have choices about what we will and won't do "for Christmas".

Christ is King, but he is his own kind of King. And for all we know, he is doing his own kind of thing this "holiday season" if we only knew where to look. For all we know he is manifesting himself even now somewhere out of the limelight, keeping his characteristic low profile, sharing God's love away from the paparazzi, the crowds, and the shoppers.

Writing in 1959, the Beat Poet Lawrence Ferlinghetti captures the essence of Christ's peculiar kingship in this haunting poem:

Christ Climbed Down

Christ climbed down
from His bare Tree
this year
and ran away to where
there were no rootless Christmas trees
hung with candycanes and breakable stars

Christ climbed down
from His bare Tree
this year
and ran away to where
there were no gilded Christmas trees
and no tinsel Christmas trees
and no tinfoil Christmas trees
and no pink plastic Christmas trees
and no gold Christmas trees
and no black Christmas trees
and no powderblue Christmas trees
hung with electric candles
and encircled by tin electric trains
and clever cornball relatives

Christ climbed down
from His bare Tree
this year
and ran away to where
no intrepid Bible salesmen
covered the territory
in two-tone cadillacs
and where no Sears Roebuck creches
complete with plastic babe in manger
arrived by parcel post
the babe by special delivery
and where no televised Wise Men
praised the Lord Calvert Whiskey

Christ climbed down
from His bare Tree
this year
and ran away to where
no fat handshaking stranger
in a red flannel suit
and a fake white beard
went around passing himself off
as some sort of North Pole saint
crossing the desert to Bethlehem
Pennsylvania
in a Volkswagen sled
drawn by rollicking Adirondack reindeer
and German names
and bearing sacks of Humble Gifts
from Saks Fifth Avenue
for everybody's imagined Christ child

Christ climbed down
from His bare Tree
this year
and ran away to where
no Bing Crosby carollers
groaned of a tight Christmas
and where no Radio City angels
iceskated wingless
thru a winter wonderland
into a jinglebell heaven
daily at 8:30
with Midnight Mass matinees

Christ climbed down
from His bare Tree
this year
and softly stole away into

some anonymous Mary's womb again
where in the darkest night
of everybody's anonymous soul
He awaits again
an unimaginable
and impossibly
Immaculate Reconciliation
the very craziest of
Second Comings

To the glory of God. Amen.

~Rev. Ruth Boling