

Stretching Toward Sunday

Thoughts, readings and reflections
based on this week's lectionary readings

November 22, 2015

Christ the King/Reign of Christ Sunday

The readings this week:

- 2 Samuel 23:1-7 ◦ Psalm 132:1-12, (13-18)
- Revelation 1:4b-8 ◦ John 18:33-37

[Click here to read this week's Scriptures](#)

Black Friday - The One Before Advent

The Sunday sermon after Thanksgiving Day should be a no-brainer. We have much for which to be thankful, and so we count our blessings, be they family and friends, health and a roof over our heads, our cups overflow with blessings, and so shall our tables groan, and our stomachs stretch, till we feel like we may truly burst with gratitude. Dana and I did our best to preserve the spirit of Thanksgiving in our music, singing traditional hymns like "Now Thank We All Our God." Thanksgiving should last the whole weekend, after all the leftovers are still in the fridge.

But while I was still recovering from my bout of gratitude, the nation had moved on to a new holiday called Black Friday. How odd that after being so grateful for the things in life that truly matter, we would then spend the very next day buying stuff that truly does not matter. How can our grasp on gratitude slip so quickly. One day we have all we need, and the next day we need all we do not have.

What great irony that our lectionary Gospel reading today comes from, yes, Black Friday. The only other day we read from the 18th chapter of John is on what Christians call Good Friday, or Black Friday, the day that Jesus is crucified, because he has angered the Chief Priest for chasing the money changers out of the temple, among other things. What is truth, indeed, Pontius Pilate? What are we to do with the man Jesus, this King whose Kingdom is not of this world?

The lectionary is sliding just a little glimpse of Lent into our awareness, before we move into Advent next week. Before we move to the season of celebrating a light shining in the darkness, we are reminded what darkness is really like, and why we need the light in the first place. Of course the majority of Christians in the world are not celebrating the American holiday of Thanksgiving. This is rather, Reign of Christ or Christ the King Sunday.

The Gospel reading throws us right into the middle of a noisy argument that we are not prepared for in any way. The very first line is transitional, telling us that Pilate is again entering his headquarters. Let me set the scene for you as staged by the author of John. Our short five verses are actually scene two of seven at Pilate's praetorium. We can have some sympathy for Pilate, a Roman who probably wants to be in Jerusalem about as much as I

want to be in West Bumpjump, Texas. He is awakened to find a group of clergy with torches and a prisoner, wailing about justice regarding some religious matter that is rather unclear. Pilate invites them in, but apparently they cannot come in because the Passover is happening tomorrow and they would be ritually defiled and not able to eat at the Thanksgiving... wait I mean Passover feast.

"Right," thinks Pilate, "these yokels wake me up before the rosy-fingered dawn to judge some religious matter, and they think they will be defiled by entering my fine house." No wonder he says, "Go judge him by your own law." The clergy shout back, "But we don't have the death penalty, and it is almost time for Thanksgiving Dinner." Well, what has he done, Pilate asks. Would we have brought him to you if he wasn't a criminal?

This is where our lesson today picks up, with Pilate going back inside to speak with Jesus and engage in a little shuttle diplomacy to defuse the situation. He speaks with Jesus to find out his version of the events, and says, "Look, I'm not one of you, what is this all about?" All he gets is that Jesus sees himself as some kind of king, but not of this world. Jesus says that he is telling the truth and anyone who wants to know the truth should listen to his voice. At this point, Pilate scoffs his most famous words, "What is truth?"

Like Pilate I navigate seven times a day between church and world, and sometimes wearily ask, "What is truth?" But better that for me than to be with Peter swearing, "I do not know that man, Jesus!" I cannot objectively say what truth is. I can only say with John Wesley that I was strangely-warmed within and knew it was Jesus. I can only say I am blessed by the love of God, called out of the waters of baptism to serve, challenged and broken-hearted at the injustice of the world's crosses that still crucify the innocent, filled with the hope of resurrection. Advent comes upon us next week, with the promise of new birth and a light shining in the darkness.

~ An excerpt, read the
article in its entirety at
[Blooming Cactus](#)



Reflecting on the Word



1st Reading: [2 Samuel 23:1-7](#)

Discuss the symbolism of the poem in 2 Samuel 23:1-7. What does this tell us about the importance of having good rulers? How do our present leaders measure up to David as a political leader? Do they meet the descriptions of the leaders in this passage? What are some examples of how today's political leaders try to secure power by the use of symbols, gestures and drama. Think particularly about how the media is used in political campaigns. What is the difference between securing power by giving gifts and securing power by bribery? Was David engaged in bribery with the cities of Israel? Why or why not? Is bribery always wrong? [Omnibus I Biblical and Classic Civilizations](#)

Psalm Reading: [Psalm 132:1-12, \(13-18\)](#)

What has David done? Explain his desire (See 2 Sam. 7). How is God's chosen dwelling different from David's conception? What is one area in life where I need to stop thinking my way and start thinking God's way? What kind of hardships had David endured during his life? How important was it to David that God would have a suitable place to have the Ark? What kind of temple are you making yourself out to be? [This Day with God, Bible Discussion Group Study Questions](#)

We have come to the end of another liturgical year, an appropriate time, Dianne Bergant writes, to observe Reign of Christ Sunday. After all, everything we claim as people of faith comes to a fitting conclusion here, with Christ as the focal point, reigning over all creation in goodness and truth, a "ruler" we can approach without fear, knowing that we belong to this gentle and loving shepherd-king who leads us, and cares for us, and calls us home, where we belong. Truly, there is no need for fear. In the meantime, living in what Walter Brueggemann calls "a seduced world" (one thinks of the way a seduced world wanders away, like a lost sheep), we pray that we might find the right words--and actions--to express the truth of our lives and the truth of who Jesus Christ is in our lives. Brueggemann's prayer is a fitting way to end one year, and to begin a new one: *"Give us courage to depart the pretend world of euphemism, to call things by their right name, to use things for their right use, to love our neighbor as you love us."*

~ Kate Huey, [Weekly Sermon Seeds](#)



3rd Reading: [Revelation 1:4b-8](#)

What is your initial image of the book of Revelation. What comes to mind when you hear the word "Revelation?" The Revelation to John has been the source of many "end times" books, movies, and musings. Revelation can also be understood as a letter from John of Patmos, a mentor and friend to the named churches. How, if at all, does this change your image or understanding of Revelation? What has Jesus "made us to be?" Or, put another way, what are we called to do for Him, in response to all that He has done for us? What do you think of when you think about Christ as King? Is this a difficult concept for you? Do verses 7-8 move you to thoughts of praise, or concerns over misuses of "kingship" authority in human society? [United Methodist Church of Yucaipa](#)

4th Reading: [John 18:33-37](#)

Where is the deepest fear in this scene between Jesus and Pilate? What do you think is going on in Pilate's mind and heart? Under what illusions are we living in our society? In the church? Would observers recognize that Jesus Christ is "king" of our lives? What does it mean to be "in the world" and yet belong to God? [Weekly Seeds](#)

Praying Toward Sunday

Almighty God, you remembered the oath you swore to David and so established a glorious realm of salvation through Jesus of Nazareth, his heir. Train our eyes to see your righteous rule, that, standing firmly in hope before the powers of this world, we may heed your voice and be constant in your truth. Amen.

