

November 20, 2016 Sermon - Reign of Christ

Have you ever had one of those moments in your life when things are not really what they seem? Or you see something that is not what it appears to be. So as many of you know I do spend a bit of time on Facebook and I like to take those quizzes that show up on my news feed. So the other day I was scrolling through my feed, trying really hard not to get pulled into any more conversations around the American election and I came across a quiz that said I could see if I had a pilot's eyesight. Well who would not want to know if they had the eyesight of a pilot? So I decided to take the quiz. Well the first picture was this picture of this crowd of people, taken from overhead, with a big red arrow pointing to this person, or thing, asking what it was. The quiz gave a number of choices, but really what it was supposed to be. In fact it turned out that this is a bag, with wheels, and just so you know it told me that I had the eyesight of a pilot! So in the vein I am going to show you some pictures of things that are not at all what they seem.

(picture of guy in wedding dress)

So, what do we see here? Do we see a man wearing a wedding dress?

(picture of dog with human body)

Or a dog with the body of a human?

(picture of semi-transparent cat)

Or a cat that seems to be semi-transparent?

These things are not what they seem to be.

This is where we are today in the church year. We find ourselves on a day when we are called to celebrate something that is not what it seems.

This is the last Sunday of the liturgical year. The liturgical year, also known as the church year or Christian year consists of the cycle of liturgical seasons in Christian churches that determines when feast days, including celebrations of saints, are to be observed, and which portions of Scripture are to be read in an annual cycle. The Liturgical Year is also marked by special seasons—Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, Creation, and Ordinary Time. The Liturgical Year begins on the first Sunday of Advent, which usually occurs around the beginning of December or the end of November, and ends on the feast of Christ the King/or the Reign of Christ.

(picture of crown)

So today is Reign of Christ, or Christ the King Sunday and this is rather an interesting description of the day, but I suppose one needs to ask oneself, what kind of king are we celebrating and in reality called to follow.

There once was a time when there was actual royalty that headed many societies and these members of royalty held positions of power and influence in the world, and in many ways held tightly to the power and influence. Today we still have royalty, but they are generally seen as figure heads, without any real power.

So, who are the “kings” in the world today? In many ways those who we see as kings are those who have power and influence in our world. I could make a case for the fact that, in many ways, we see movie stars, pop stars, business leaders, and sports stars as kings in our world today. I also suppose that some of these same people have become political leaders in the world, take Ronald Reagan for example, and so sometimes political leaders also become kings in the world today.

The problem with some of the people that we seem to understand worship as our “kings” in the world is that they use power in much the same way that the world has always used power.

They use their influence for their own gain; they use power to oppress others, while lifting up those who think the same things as they do.

And they can in some cases encourage the marginalization of whole segments of the population. This is exactly what occurred south of the border just over a week ago. I don't feel the need to wade into the ins and outs of the whole election down south but I will say that what happened was the legitimization of speech that only serves to put down and marginalize whole segments of the population. This was done by one who truly could be considered a “king” today. Now many people will say that this happened south of the border and should not concern us but in reality there is not an invisible wall at the border and many things do bleed across in both directions, and example this past week is the graffiti that was spray painted on both a Jewish Synagogue, and a United Church in the Ottawa area. And so today when we speak about Christ the King or the Reign of Christ I think that we need to really think about what this means.

Jeremiah in the reading from the Old Testament this morning is speaking to much the same situation. The kings of Jeremiah's time were not following God and what God wanted for the people. Jeremiah believed that this not following God, this led to the exile of the people in Babylon. So, as the people came out of exile Jeremiah is telling the people that there will be a new kind of monarchy. This will be a monarchy that is based in justice, a king who will help the people to not live in fear, but to live in peace with God.

In Luke we have much the same sentiment. The scripture from Luke is the song of celebration for Zechariah. This song of celebration was sung at the birth of Zechariah's son, John the Baptist, who would also herald the coming of a new kind of kingdom and in this song we hear **“⁷⁸Through the heartfelt mercies of our God, God's Sunrise will break in upon us, ⁷⁹Shining on those in the darkness, those sitting in the shadow of death, Then showing us the way, one foot at a time, down the path of peace.”** This is the coming of a new dawn in the world, a light that will illuminate the darkness that can overtake.

Brian Stoffregen, the pastor of Faith Lutheran Church in Yuma, puts this concept in the following way, **"I believe that one of the great, unique features of Christianity is that it is a religion of God coming down to us, rather than most other religions where we have to raise ourselves up to a godly plane. Christianity is light shining in the darkness, which destroys the darkness. It is not the darkness trying to become light. It is being transformed by God's (de-)lightful presence among us."**

(picture of ancient king)

But you see the people of Jesus' time were expecting something completely different. They were expecting a king that would change their world. A king that would run the Romans out of the country, a king that would conquer their enemies, but this is not what they received, they received quite the opposite. And if we are honest we must admit that we are being asked to do something that is really, in many ways, the opposite of what we understand. We are being asked to follow a king, who was born in a stable, to follow a king that rode on a donkey, a king that did not have an army, a king that spoke against the powers that kept the structures of injustice going. A king who himself was marginalized and oppressed.

As Christians we are being asked to look at the world in a different way, because in reality things are not what they seem. If we were to really examine the life of Christ we would see that, in reality, he himself was on the receiving end of injustice at the hands of those in power, those "kings" in his own world.

(picture of light)

And so as Christians we have been given a choice. We have kings, even today, who use power to oppress, who use power to marginalize, who use power to legitimize, misogyny, hate, racism, homophobia, and we can follow these ones.

Or we can follow a king, who says that there is a better way, a king who is asking us to change. A king who speaks of peace, justice, compassion, and inclusion.

We so know that things are not always what they seem. That following a king who asks us to lose our lives, so that we might gain life, is who we are called to be.

Many of you know that John O'Keefe from Patheos has become one of my "go to" people for quotes, and so I thought that I would quote him and his thoughts around who we are called to be as we follow Christ and those how things can really be not what they seem, **"Do you want to see minds, and hearts, change? Reach out in love to someone different today: Someone of a different religion; someone of a different ethnic background; someone of a different age; someone of a different economic status;**

Someone of different abilities; someone of a different political point of view; someone of a different sexual orientation; someone very different from you.

When we reach out beyond our limited understanding of the world around us, we're able to see people for who they are, and not what others tell us they must be. We should not reach

out to change them, or tell them they're wrong; but in reaching out, we may change, or come to the understanding that our limited point of view was wrong; and that can be scary. When we truly, in honest love, seek to know another, we experience their understanding of the world around them, through their eyes – even if that view is limited on our end, it's a start.

It's when we enclose ourselves in the prison of our own life experiences we ignore those who are different, we even fear them. We start to see them as our enemies, because they're different, and we have fooled ourselves into thinking 'different is bad.' But, when we're willing to open our prison door, and seek to connect with others who are different, we start to think differently; we see the world differently.

It's only when we break out of the prison which separate us, divide us, classify us, disconnect us from each other, we truly experience the love the Divine shares with us concerning all humanity. Our desire to connect with others should never be to change them, but to experience the world from their point of view – in that, we both might be changed. When we open our hearts to those we see as different, we find connections to our sameness, we truly experience love.”

There are many kings in the world that are calling to us to follow them, and it can be very tempting to do just that. To follow that king that tells us that it is someone else's fault that our life is the way it is. To follow that king that tells us the more we get the happier we will be. To follow that king that we don't need to treat others with respect, that it is not important to see each and every creature as a unique creation of God. Or we can follow another type of king. So, as we enter Advent, a season when we come to understand that there is a time when **“people who have lived in darkness, have seen a great light,”** which king will you follow?