

Sunday November 24, 2024
Reign of Christ Sunday

Meditation: “Endings and Beginnings”

It seems like only a couple of weeks ago that we gathered to celebrate a new year. Isaiah was pleading for God to come down and make God's presence known to God's adversaries, that nations might tremble at the presence of God. And Mark was cautioning that Jesus' coming with great power and glory would be like that of a master who had gone on an extended journey and whose return could be at any hour. Mark implores us to keep awake, to stay alert. And then, four weeks later God entered into time and space, into material bodily life in the person of Jesus. A few weeks later, we celebrated the baptism of Jesus, and the beginning of his ministry. And only a few weeks after that, we started Lent, and Jesus' journey towards Jerusalem and the pending showdown with the religious and political leaders. On Good Friday, Jesus' ministry came to an abrupt ending with his crucifixion. And three days later, the Risen Christ appeared, marking a new beginning. At the end of the season of Easter, Jesus ascended into heaven and sent the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. That day marked the beginning of the church. Then we began the long season of Ordinary time, where we learned and grew in our Christian faith, until we wound up at today – the Reign of Christ, and the ending of the liturgical year.

What endings and beginnings are you familiar with in your life?

What began a year ago, ends today. So, it is fitting that the lessons for today are about endings, and beginnings. The reading from second Samuel is about the end of David's life. These are the last recorded words that King David spoke before he died. Yet, David's words are not about an ending, but of a future. David's passing makes way for a dynasty to begin, for God to keep God's covenant to place a descendent of David on the throne. Solomon, then his son Rehoboam, then his son Abijah, then his son Asa, then his son Jehoshaphat, and so on, and so on. The ending is filled not with dread, but with hope of a new beginning, unknown though it may be to David. We know

now, in retrospect, what David didn't know then, that it was Solomon who would build the first temple that David had wanted so badly to build.

The Psalm talks of a new beginning. God will make a branch sprout for David. The tree that was cut down, will once again see life. We read back from our time to the time of the Psalmist and see in that reading a promise that the reign of David's dynasty that was cut off by the Babylonian conquest will be restored. It is a promise of future hope. And, as we read it now, it is a promise fulfilled in Jesus.

In the gospel lesson, Jesus, like David, is at his end. He is in Pilate's residence and is being questioned by Pilate. Pilate, and only Pilate, has the power to sentence Jesus to death, or to spare him that sentence. Pilate asks him if he is King of the Jews. Jesus, not to be drawn into the debate asks why Pilate is asking. He wants to know, did Pilate arrive at that conclusion on his own, or is he accepting the word of the Sanhedrin. Then Jesus tells Pilate, "My kingdom does not belong to this world. If my kingdom belonged to this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here." Jesus' kingdom is not like the kingdoms of the world that get rich at the expense of the masses and are maintained by the use of force. Jesus' kingdom is not like that. Jesus' kingdom is one in which there is no need for the use of force to maintain power, because all have what they need to flourish and prosper. It is a kingdom of justice and righteousness. It is the kingdom that Jesus has spent his ministry describing to people as 'the good news,' literally 'the gospel.' It is the kingdom of God. And Pilate leaps to the conclusion that Jesus is saying that he is the king of that kingdom.

I guess the church also jumps to the conclusion that Jesus is the king of the kingdom of God, for today we celebrate the festival of Christ the King, or Reign of Christ. So, what I want to know is, who here thinks that the Reign of Christ has been celebrated since the beginning of the church.... say two thousand years, give or take? Who here thinks that the Reign of Christ is something I

made up in 2021? Who here thinks that the Reign of Christ started early in the 20th C? Actually, those who think that it started in the early 20th C are correct. With the rise of fascism in Spain and Italy and Germany, with the rise of Franco and Mussolini and Hitler, who was going to establish a thousand year empire, the church responded. The church said, you guys who think you are gods, you aren't. You are not the gods or the kings you make yourselves out to be. Christ is King. The thousand year reich is not the aim of humanity, but the Reign of Christ is what we all yearn for. That is the goal or the end that we all hope and pray for.

The reading from the book of the Revelation ends, "I am the Alpha and the Omega" says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.' Alpha is the first letter, the beginning, and Omega is the last letter, the end of the Greek alphabet. It speaks of God who is, who is before time, and who is beyond the end of time.

We are born, live and die. We all have our beginning and our end. And so does every human institution. It's nothing to be feared. It's not our fault. It's just the way things are. We were created by God as finite human beings. We live within limits, whether we acknowledge that or not. And every human ending leads to a new beginning.

God is eternal, without beginning or ending. I find it interesting to think that time is within eternity. If that is so, then the life we are living today is within eternity, is a part of eternal life. That means that there is no time we can be separate from God, whether we find ourselves at an ending or a beginning. Thanks be to God, the one who is and who was and who is to come. Amen.