

Worship at home

Current sermon series: Stewards of Souls
November 22, 2020

CHRIST THE KING SUNDAY

Call to worship: Psalm 2

- 1** *Why do the nations conspire^[a]
and the peoples plot in vain?*
- 2** *The kings of the earth rise up
and the rulers band together
against the LORD and against his anointed, saying,*
- 3** *“Let us break their chains
and throw off their shackles.”*
- 4** *The One enthroned in heaven laughs;
the Lord scoffs at them.*
- 5** *He rebukes them in his anger
and terrifies them in his wrath, saying,*
- 6** *“I have installed my king
on Zion, my holy mountain.”*

7 *I will proclaim the LORD’s decree:*

*He said to me, “You are my son;
today I have become your father.*

- 8** *Ask me,
and I will make the nations your inheritance,
the ends of the earth your possession.*
- 9** *You will break them with a rod of iron^[b];
you will dash them to pieces like pottery.”*

10 *Therefore, you kings, be wise;
be warned, you rulers of the earth.*

11 *Serve the LORD with fear
and celebrate his rule with trembling.*

12 *Kiss his son, or he will be angry
and your way will lead to your destruction,
for his wrath can flare up in a moment.*

Blessed are all who take refuge in him.

Footnotes

- a. [Psalm 2:1](#) Hebrew; Septuagint *rage*
b. [Psalm 2:9](#) Or *will rule them with an iron scepter* (see Septuagint and Syriac)

Opening prayer:

Holy God,
You are known to us as the Almighty, Powerful, Eternal, Ruler and Lord.
We call you our Shepherd and Guide.
We praise you with many names,
but you are beyond our imagination,
you who uttered the creating Word are so much greater than our words.
We know you in the stories of Jesus
and in him, we see your love in action, reaching out to the world.
You move in us and through us by your Spirit,
drawing us to you,
and sending us to live out your Word.
God most holy, Three in One and One in Three,
we praise you with our lips and with our lives
to offer you honour and love.¹

Hymn #295 “When long before time”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hs6NKOacN2A>

The Word of God read and interpreted:

¹ From worship resources for November 22nd available at: <https://presbyterian.ca/worship>

Stewards of Souls: Peace and Joy

This is the final sermon in our series: Stewards of Souls. We began this series by considering the question posed in Psalm 137 by the exiles in Babylon: “How can we sing the Lord’s song in a foreign land?” My argument, which I began making in September, has been that even in this foreign land of pandemic, even when we aren’t gathering in physical sanctuaries, even when the community is dispersed, we can continue singing the Lord’s song. One way is to learn to give thanks in all circumstances. Another way is to care for the portion of the heavenly wealth that our Master has entrusted to us; namely, our souls. To care for, to grow, to nourish our bodies, minds, and spirits. So, for the last number of weeks we’ve been looking at various qualities of a healthy, Holy-Spirit led disciple of Jesus: love, faith, patience, kindness and generosity, self-control and meekness. Nurturing the healthy root beliefs and values by which the Holy Spirit creates within us these qualities is an act of discipleship that doesn’t depend on whether or not we’re in the temple on Sunday morninc.

For this final installment, I want to read first from Paul’s letter to the Philippians and then from the Gospel of John.

When reading Philippians, it’s helpful to remember that as Paul wrote these words, his life was anything but easy and optimistic. He was under strict house arrest. He was under the scrutiny of Roman soldiers. He was in limbo as he waited for a trial which might lead to his execution. And in the midst of such uncertainty and potential fear he wrote:

READ PHILIPPIANS 4:4-7.

READ JOHN 1:1-5, 10-14.

How can we sing the Lord’s song in a foreign land?

That question can be read in two ways: (i) What instruments do we have available to us in a foreign land with which we can sing the Lord’s song? (Such as giving thanks and stewarding souls.) and, (ii) Is it possible for us to sing the Lord’s song in a foreign land?

John’s gospel suggests that it is impossible for disciples of Jesus to not sing the Lord’s song in a foreign land.

It begins with the memorable and majestic phrase: “In the beginning was the Word.”

A word is an expressed thought. John never questioned the existence of God. His purpose was not to prove that God exists. He took it as obvious that there has always been a powerful, sentient, intelligent, yet unseen deity: In the beginning was a God who was able to express thought.

His thought was of creation.

God’s thought was of creating a people with whom he could share his own life.

This life that is the life of the eternal Creator, contains no darkness. When you light a candle there may be darkness all around, but where the flame is there is only light.

In the beginning was the Word,
and the Word was with God,
and the Word was God.

All things came into being through him,
and without him not one thing came into being.

What has come into being in him was life,
the life was the light of all people.

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

The idea of God to create and to share his boundless life with his creation took on substance and, in a man, named Jesus, the son of Mary, the Word took up temporary lodging among us.

In the incarnation, which we celebrated last Christmas, the Word became flesh.

On the cross, which we remembered on Good Friday, he fought the battle in our place.

In his resurrection, which we celebrated at Easter, he won the war on our behalf.

In his ascension he sits on the throne of heaven and earth.

By his Spirit he continues his ministry in and through everyone who calls on him in faith and repentance. Through his disciples, Jesus brings his kingdom into reality:

“..to all who believe in his name he gave power to become children of God.”

How can we not sing the Lord’s song?

This was the conviction of the apostle Paul, even as he sat in prison and even as the Philippian Christians faced their own opposition. The Lord is near. What have we to do but rejoice in the Lord always?

The final two qualities of Spirit-led life are joy and peace. Like all the other qualities we've been considering, joy and peace are gifts. The Holy Spirit develops them within us as we yield to the Spirit's teaching and take responsibility for caring for the soil that is our body, mind, and spirit.

Joy doesn't depend on circumstances. Happiness does. The root word of happy is 'hap'. As in "happenstance." It means an event, or luck, or chance. Happiness is an emotion that you can only feel when your circumstances are positive. Joy, however, is far more stable. Joy is beyond emotion. *Joy* is the result of recognizing grace in spite of circumstances. It's the relief you experience when you are aware that no matter what, you live, move, and have your being in the God who chooses to work for your wholeness, to protect you, and to share with you his life that is not bound by time or decay.

And *peace* is the state when all the essential and fragmented pieces are being brought together and the state of wholeness and harmony is here to stay.

The church year ends today, on Christ the King Sunday. It began in a time of waiting for peace and joy. It journeyed through Christmas and Epiphany, Lent and Easter, Ascension and Pentecost. It ends with the affirmation that though the darkness is a reality, so is the presence of our God. Christ's kingdom has begun, and the darkness will not overcome it.

The Lord is King;
The King is Light;
The Light is Life;
The Life is near.
Blessed are all who take refuge in the Lord.

"May I run the race before me, strong and brave to face the foe,
looking only unto Jesus as I onward go."

And to the God who gives love, faith, patience, kindness, generosity, self-control, gentleness, joy, and peace belong all glory and honour now and forevermore. Amen.

Prayers of thanksgiving and intercession:

Lord Jesus Christ, you proclaimed God's kingdom among us and within us.
In the power of the Spirit, your love is always at work,
bringing good out of evil and life out of death.
We thank you that your love never lets us go,
for you have known the good times and the hard times of this life before us.

You came as one who was hungry and thirsty.
Where people live on the streets today, suffer from hunger, or beg for a meal:
Your kingdom come.
Your will be done.

You came as a stranger in need of welcome.
Where people live lonely lives or feel like strangers in a strange land; where love is
lacking and people face rejection for the colour of their skin or the language they speak:
Your kingdom come.
Your will be done.

You came as one who was naked.
Where people lack enough clothing, shelter or life's basic resources; where people live
without dignity, exposed to every kind of pain and hardship:
Your kingdom come.
Your will be done.

You came as one who was broken.
Where people feel pain in body, mind or spirit;
where someone grieves the loss of a beloved or the future they planned; in places where
the pandemic has done its worst and desperation has moved in:
Your kingdom come.
Your will be done.

You came as a Shepherd.
Where people are led astray or nations are ruled by corrupt or greedy leaders and there
is no peace in the land:
Your kingdom come.
Your will be done.

You came as one who was in prison.
Where people are treated unfairly, targeted or tortured;
where justice has failed and people are punished with cruelty:
Your kingdom come.

Your will be done.

You came as one proclaiming the kingdom of God.
And so we lift up these prayers in your name, Lord Jesus,
knowing that your kingdom is drawing near
and that we meet you in the face of those who cry out to us.
Hasten the day when God will wipe away our tears
and death will be no more.²

Hymn#644 “May the mind of Christ my Saviour”
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y_ZBhSxWots

Blessing:

The Lord bless you and keep you,
the Lord be kind and gracious to you,
the Lord look upon you with favour,
and grant you peace.
Amen.

² From worship resources for November 22nd available at: <https://presbyterian.ca/worship>