

Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14

9 As I was watching,
 thrones were raised up.
The ancient one took his seat.
 His clothes were white like snow;
 his hair was like a lamb's wool.
 His throne was made of flame;
 its wheels were blazing fire.

10 A river of fire flowed out from his presence;
 thousands upon thousands served him;
 ten thousand times ten thousand stood ready to serve him!
The court sat in session; the scrolls were opened.

13 As I continued to watch this night vision of mine, I suddenly saw
one like a human being[a]
 coming with the heavenly clouds.
He came to the ancient one
 and was presented before him.

14 Rule, glory, and kingship were given to him;
 all peoples, nations, and languages will serve him.
His rule is an everlasting one—
 it will never pass away!—
 his kingship is indestructible.

Revelation 1:4b-8

Grace and peace to you from the one who is and was and is coming, and from the seven spirits that are before God's throne, ⁵ and from Jesus Christ—the faithful witness, the firstborn from among the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.
To the one who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood, ⁶ who made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father—to him be glory and power forever and always.
Amen.

⁷ Look, he is coming with the clouds! Every eye will see him, including those who pierced him, and all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of him. This is so. Amen. ⁸ "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "the one who is and was and is coming, the Almighty."

John 18:33-37

³³ Pilate went back into the palace. He summoned Jesus and asked, "Are you the king of the Jews?" ³⁴ Jesus answered, "Do you say this on your own or have others spoken to you about me?" ³⁵ Pilate responded, "I'm not a Jew, am I? Your nation and its chief priests handed you over to me. What have you done?"

³⁶ Jesus replied, "My kingdom doesn't originate from this world. If it did, my guards would fight so that I wouldn't have been arrested by the Jewish leaders. My kingdom isn't from here." ³⁷ "So you are a king?" Pilate said. Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. I was born and came into the world for this reason: to testify to the truth. Whoever accepts the truth listens to my voice."

Sermon

Grace to you and peace from God our Creator, our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit: Amen.

Last week we began a series called, “Why We Do What We Do: The Content of Worship.” We talked about why we do things like sing the Kyrie and celebrate Communion every week, namely because God is present and actively at work for the good amidst even the tragedies of the world. We named that God doesn’t cause suffering, but promises that suffering won’t have the last word, and that worship helps us to remember that every time that we gather together. If you’re interested in hearing more about that, you can find that on our website.

When we’re curious about why we do what we do, we can look to days like today for an answer, for the answer. As each of today’s scriptures indicates, we’re here to celebrate the Reign of Christ, a festival day more commonly

known to us as Christ the King Sunday. We do what we do as a church because God became human in the person Jesus, a Jew from Nazareth, who died and rose again. The creator of all things who became a creation now rules over all things. Though everyone doesn't yet recognize this authority, and while some still serve other idols, a day is coming when every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

In the words of an Episcopalian priest friend of mine, *Because Jesus is Lord, your fear is not. Because Jesus is Lord, your bank account is not. Because Jesus is Lord, your preferred political candidate is not. Because Jesus is Lord, every power and principality of this world is not.* Christ the King Sunday reminds us that in our one faith and one baptism, we have only one Lord who is Jesus Christ. Our worship is meant to shape our lives in ways that recognize this reality, that Jesus is Lord over our calendars and our

wallets and our politics and our sexuality and our homes
and our environments and all that was or is or ever will be.

So how does worship do that?

Some people refer to the constant standing and sitting in our worship as Lutheran calisthenics. Often I think of it as something like religious whack-a-mole. Either way, what's really happening is that, when we stand, we're recognizing and honoring God's presence amongst us. We're using our bodies to reflect the reign of Christ, that God is Lord. Think about Khaleesi or Tommen in Game of Thrones. In their presence, especially in their courts, everyone stands to honor them, to welcome them, to signal their authority in the place. In our nation's democracy, this still occurs as the President arrives at congress for the State of the Union. We even do this when someone we care about or respect enters the room we're in. We rise out of our seats to welcome them, to show our attentiveness and appreciation

for their presence. In worship, we stand to signal our honor and respect for God's presence amongst us and the authority that God bears over our lives.

But the reign of Christ is about more than just respect. Much more. This Lord is the one who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood, who made us priests of God. The reign of Christ is ultimately about the reign of love in the world where we're free from the power of sin and where each of us may fully inhabit our identities as God's priests, God's children, God's friends. In the fullness of Christ's reign, we become fully who we are meant to be. This means that we no longer remain bound to the demands placed on us by our culture or by sin. The kind of monarch we have in Jesus is not like the removed royal, isolated in a court of the rich who keeps power by taxing and punishing us, nor like the president, barricaded away behind secret services and armored cars. This king leads from the center of our lives

because Jesus took on our life, eradicated the consequences of our sin through the cross, and rose again to restore life again within our bodies. That's the compassionate king we find amongst us, the one who didn't have to become human but chose it out of love for us, who didn't have to suffer birth or hunger or tears or death but chose to out of love for us. Jesus gave us life through the very same Spirit of God that raised him from the dead, and so God reigns not only in far away heavens, but in and through us here and now. This is the king we find in the Reign of Christ.

That's why so much of our worship is tied up in actions of praise. Think about the use of song in worship. Many of us sing more during this hour of the week than at any other point throughout the week. Song not only comes as an appropriate kind of praise, but helps us to actually feel more thankful. Something about song moves us from a place of

rationality to a place of emotion where, no matter the talent of the musician, song reflects a sort of beautiful thankfulness.

The offering also helps us reflect our thankfulness. We have a chance to offer physical signs of our thankfulness to God's mission in the world. We receive all that we have as a gift from God, and return a portion as a sign of our appreciation not only for the gift of salvation, but the gifts of breath and love and food and art and smiles and sunrises and puppies and books and all those things that bring joy in our world. We offer to God resources that might help others experience the joy that God's given to us, so that through the church, God may work to advance the victory of joy in our world.

Alongside of respect and praise, the reign of Christ is also about creation. It's about the culmination of our identities as co-creators, as little Christs, as God's image

bearers. God's Kingdom is a place shaped by the cruciform love that recreated us from death-bound sinners to saints full of abundant life.

That's why art and architecture is so plentiful in worship. We come together not only to create songs, but to worship in spaces that reflect an otherworldly beauty. Stained glass takes the light and reshapes it into beautiful colors just as God reshapes our brokenness into beauty. Solid workmanship on this floor carried saints for over one hundred years and will carry untold more into the future. A raised ceiling helps to echo our praises along with the heavenly host. White linens beaming God's purity and woven paraments to reflect God's intricate weaving of our own lives. That's why, with our projection system, we utilize some kind of image to undergird the meaning of the sermon, to offer a visual representation of the Gospel.

This reign of Christ even helps to shape the flow of our worship. You might notice that there's four major portions to what we do: Gathering, Word, Sacrament, and Sending. Gathered by the Holy Spirit, we confess our sins and receive God's forgiveness, a sign of Christ's rule through compassion and love. God's Word through Scripture, sermon, and prayer announces what that Kingdom looks like. Sacraments of Holy Communion and Baptism give us tangible signs of that kingdom coming alive in our midst, as well as bring the presence of God within us to seal us for that kingdom life. We're sent from that place, forgiven by God, spoken to by God, fed with God, to then introduce God and that kingdom we experienced to others in need of that message of compassion, of salvation, of love. The kingdom is not meant to stay in this building or only last during this hour, but rather meant to spread from here, carrying the infectious, transformative love of God.

Few other gatherings we ever attend have this kind of intentional shape and practice at their core. As Jesus said, God's kingdom is not of this world, and in that vein, worship will be very otherworldly at times. This is one of the few places in our culture that's not first about us, but instead first about God and others, and only about us in terms of shaping us to love God and forming us to love others. We use our words and actions, our instruments and behaviors, and God gathers them into a sign of a new age, where there will be no more pain or shame, no more tears or tragedy, where all will be wrapped within the love of God. Worship is meant to draw us into God's kingdom by being a reflection of God's kingdom. There's lots of things we do in worship, and many more than we've discussed the past few weeks, and the reasons we've discussed only open a window to the mansion of meaning that lives within our worship.

But what we can't forget, what we mustn't forget, is that even as we do certain things, God remains even more actively at work. We meet God in preaching, where, as Dietrich Bonhoeffer reminds us, through the spoken word Christ walks amongst the people as the Living Word. We meet God in baptism, where water comes alive with the Spirit of the Living God. We meet God in communion, where bread becomes God's body and wine becomes God's blood. We meet God in prayer, who continues an ancient conversation of love with us. We meet God in lament, where the tears of Christ fall to the ground with our own. We see the face of God in the faces of our sisters and brothers here, who bear the image of God and bring the presence of God into our midst.

Why do we do what we do? Because the reign of Christ has begun, and we're called to live more and more as a part of that reality. We're called to recognize that

Christ is Lord, which means that nothing else is the final authority, that no one else rules our lives. One day the reign of Christ will, as the hymn says, stretch from shore to shore until moons shall wax and wane no more. We worship as a preparation for that, and to help us live in such a way that reflects the fullness of God's kingdom to the world right now. Here, at the end of this liturgical year, our learning is not yet done. God continues to work to reshape us for the kingdom in these and myriad other ways. That's why we're here. We, the children of God's kingdom, are maturing in that identity, growing in the kingdom of God. Let's continue to gather, to listen to the voice of God shape us for the kingdom of God. Amen.