

“Preparing Our Hearts for Christ the King”

Lucy Crain

Date: November 26, 2023



In the liturgical calendar, the yearly calendar that many religious denominations follow, including ours, today is “Christ the King” Sunday. I was not familiar with this tradition previously, so you can imagine I was a bit anxious when asked to lead today’s worship. In preparation for the service, I spent some time exploring scripture passages as possibilities for our readings. I was pleasantly reminded that our Bible is filled with assurances of the rule of Christ and the reconciliation he brings to all God’s creation. It turns out, luckily for me, all Sundays are actually “Christ the King” Sundays as, in many ways, we continually celebrate the triumphant sovereignty of our Lord and Savior. Thanks be to God.

Let’s dig into the two examples from today’s scriptures of this proclamation of “Christ the King.” Our first passage is from the gospel of Luke, and as Scott mentioned, it is the words of Zechariah celebrating the coming of the Christ child and the salvation that he will bring to God’s people. Some of you were here last week when Mary spoke so beautifully about the mercy of our God. This passage claims that because of that very mercy, the “dawn from on high” will break upon us. However, that light bursting forth into the world is not just for us to sit and turn our faces towards the glow of God’s goodness. The passage proclaims the light has come into the world to “shine on those who sit in darkness.” These words might sound a bit familiar to you as we prepare for Advent and the declaration we read each year from the Gospel of John:

“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overtake it.”

The early Christians in Colossae might have been searching for signs of the light as they were struggling as a new congregation during a time of intense oppression and persecution. Our second passage today is a letter from the apostle Paul to offer a word of support and encouragement to a people in great need. I wonder if those early Christians often felt distant from the shining of God’s countenance? Did they ask themselves where is this God who has called them into a new Kingdom? Did they wonder just exactly what it is they had signed up for? Do we, as Christians today, ever have occasion to seriously question God’s presence?

Some of you may know, that a group of us recently returned from a trip to visit friends of this congregation in Cuba. We had a wonderful trip and visited the seminary there and several different churches. We talked with one pastor, Joel Dopiko, who was brutally honest with us about the state of his parishioners who have no options for an economically sustainable future. He confessed that he can no longer preach about hope to his congregation but instead he preaches about faith. It is amazing to me that he can. Joel is personally one of the many Cuban families that are living separately, as he sent his wife and infant son to live with family abroad. Joel hopes to be reunited with them one day but in the meantime he spoke, with tears in his eyes, of the story of Moses’ mother placing him in a basket for a chance at life. The stories of scripture inspire him to continue in his ministry to people who must remain in Cuba.

Another of the pastors we met with shared with us that some Christians living there claim that Jesus is no longer in Cuba but has fled, like so many others, to the United States. However, ask any of our travelers, and

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they will tell you that we worshipped in a tiny, rural church with very little resources and Jesus Christ was indeed present there. It was a beautiful service and we were humbled to be a witness to their faithful worship. After talking with several different pastors, it was clear the church is definitely thriving in a country that is certainly not. When I think of a light rushing in, I think of our friends in Cuba and how they can lift their faces to the sun and know that God has not forgotten them and they will be included in the ushering in of God’s kingdom.

Similarly, as our passages mention, when I read of God guiding us in the way of peace and Christ making peace through the blood of the cross, I think of our brothers and sisters living in the ravages of war. I am so blessed that when I think personally of peace, I think of getting away to the mountains for the weekend or making up with a sibling who I perceived wronged me in some way. I know that there are others who think of peace in terms of cease-fires and bomb shelters. Many of us have traveled, perhaps with this congregation, to regions now plagued by intense warfare and maybe we ask ourselves where is God’s peace in the midst of it all? If Christ is indeed the King, why must God’s people endure the ravages of war or the anguish of being forgotten?

Closer to home here in Charlotte, we all see those living without shelter and we wonder where is God for them? Perhaps we walk past them on the way into the sanctuary. Do they worship? Can they find the courage to pray? Do they have a sense of the Kingdom of God? How can we know these answers apart from reaching out and being in relationship with them? What does that look like for us as disciples?

We may not understand why our siblings in Christ