

Sermon Notes from CMJ
26th Sunday after Pentecost – Year B

RCL Readings – 2 Samuel 23:1-7; Psalm 132; Revelation 1:4-8; John 18:33-37

ACNA Readings – Daniel 7:9-14; Psalm 93; Revelation 1:4-8; John 18:33-37

Introduction. The last Sunday in the Church year is known as the Reign of Christ or Feast of Christ the King. It is a recent addition to the liturgical calendar, having been added by Pope Pius XI in 1925. Pius XI instituted the feast day during a time that saw the rise of fascism and militant nationalism to remind the faithful that God is the ultimate king.

Common Theme. Kingship is the obvious theme that runs through our readings this week. The Kingdom of Heaven is not a democracy, which can seemingly be at odds with our modern, independent and freedom-loving societies. We may not appreciate monarchy here on earth, but we all have to acknowledge that our Saviour and Redeemer is also our Lord and King.

2 Samuel 23:1-7. The last words of David are a short psalm of wisdom from the king before the end of his life. David speaks from both experience as Israel's king and through the divine inspiration of the Holy Spirit. One of the most important tasks for any ruler to engage in was to exercise justice. David knows this because he has seen the goodness that justice provides the people of God and the evil that comes when people are denied justice. The essential element for justice to work in and through a ruler is the fear of the Lord. David passed this instruction onto his son Solomon, who would later write 'the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom' (Prov 1:7). A king who recognizes that there is a God above him, a greater authority who will require an account of how he ruled the people, should be influenced to act with wisdom and justice. David's final words also acknowledged that God had made an everlasting covenant with him. The covenant is not based on the frailty of David or his descendants but on the faithfulness of God. Kings and rulers will come and go, some good and some bad, but the promise of God to David included an everlasting throne and kingdom. Ultimately, the kingdom is realized through Jesus the son of David, who once raised to life will never die again and continues to rule and reign with wisdom and justice.

Psalm 132. The Psalms of Ascent – Psalms 120-134 – are believed to be a collection of sung prayers for use during pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Psalm 132:6-7 declares that the worshippers are indeed on their way to God's dwelling place, the temple, to worship at his footstool. Verses 8-10 adapt the words of Solomon and his dedication prayer of the First Temple in 2 Chronicles 6:41-42, where the worshippers pray that God will be present in his chosen dwelling place. It is one thing to journey to a building, even if that building is the temple. It is another thing if the destination is the presence of the Lord. The heart of the worshipper should desire the presence of God. The prayer begins with a request that God remember David's intention to build the house of the Lord. It was David's heart's desire to do so, and though he was forbidden to construct the temple for being a man of bloodshed, he did make all the arrangements and prepare all the materials. Interestingly, the song recalls David's hardships and calamities that he had to endure. Even David, the mightiest of Israel's kings, was not a stranger to affliction. We can take

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comfort that God does indeed remember the sufferings of his servants, including kings. After all, the messianic king, the anointed Son of David, though a king, would come to serve and also suffer to fulfil God's promises to David and the people of God.

Revelation 1:1-8. The book of Revelation is the *apokalypsis* of Jesus the Messiah. Today we often use the word 'apocalypse' to mean something powerful, destructive, and in reference to the end of the world. The Greek word *apokalypsis* actually means to unveil, reveal or to take out of hiding. Revelation was written during a time of persecution (or the perceived threat of persecution) of the emerging church. The apocalyptic genre endeavours to reveal the spiritual or heavenly realities to present-day events or challenges. Apocalyptic literature was common in Jewish tradition, going back to the books like Ezekiel and Daniel. In antiquity, the Roman Caesar ruled the known world, yet Revelation would like us to remember that it is God who sits on the ultimate throne and reveals that Jesus is the real king of the world.

Verse 3 says, 'Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it'. Revelation offers a unique blessing to those who read and keep the message that Jesus is king! This passage presents several titles of Jesus. He is the 'faithful witness and firstborn of the dead'. He has been raised to the heavenly realms and now sits in rulership over the kings of the earth. These are good things to keep in our hearts. When Jesus speaks in Revelation, he calls himself the Alpha and the Omega. Alpha and Omega are the beginning and ending letters of the Greek alphabet and function as the saying, 'the First and the Last'. This was never a title of Jesus during his earthly ministry. While Jesus was on earth, he called himself the Son of Man. Now in heaven, he is the First and the Last. There is nothing new under the sun, a wise man once said. The term 'the First and the Last' has been used before. In Isaiah 48:12-16, we find someone who defines himself as the First (Alpha) and the Last (Omega). Isaiah goes on to say that the First and the Last laid the foundations of the world, ordered the universe and is thus supernatural in power. We know from the book of Genesis that God made the world. Verse 16 goes on to say that God (Yahweh) sends him (the First and the Last) with his Spirit. The Father is not the one with the title of First and Last; that title is claimed by Jesus. Jesus exists before time, is involved in Creation and is sent by the Father with the Spirit. He rules and reigns over all the lords of the earth. He is the eternal King.

John 18:33-37. Pontius Pilate was the governor of the Roman province of Judea from approximately AD 27-37. While he eventually ordered the crucifixion of Jesus, the Gospels portray him as reluctant to do so. Note that the Nicene Creed declares that Jesus was crucified under Pontius Pilate and not by Israel. Pilate was initially fully invested in the arrest and interrogation of Jesus. He sent armed men to arrest Jesus and interrogated him to discover if Jesus was supporting an insurrection. In the end, Pilate found no evidence to support any wrongdoing and sought to release Jesus. Pilate hoped to give the problem to Herod who ruled Galilee, where Jesus was from. At one point, Pilate asks Jesus one of the most important questions in the history of asking questions. Are you a king? We all need to answer this

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question ourselves. Is Jesus the king of our lives? The Kingdom of Heaven is not a theocratic democracy where we have a role in telling God what to do and how to run his kingdom. What does independence and freedom in Christ mean for us in the Kingdom of Heaven? Freedom in Christ does not mean that we can all do what we want and do what is right in our own eyes. To declare that Jesus is king is to submit ourselves to the Lord's rule and reign. 'If you love me, you will keep my commandments', says Jesus. Jesus assures Pilate that he is not a direct political threat when he declares that his kingdom is not of this world. The Kingdom of Heaven is not going to fight Rome, but it will control the hearts and minds of those on this earth who make up the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus says that he was born to be a king. We need to remember that. Jesus is indeed our saviour, redeemer, and friend. What a friend we have in Jesus, absolutely! But Jesus is also a king above all other kings. It is his voice to which we should listen, his word that should be on our lips, and his teachings that we should follow. Let us answer this question of ourselves in all honesty: Is Jesus more of king of our lives this year than last year? May the Holy Spirit help us to answer in the affirmative.

ACNA Readings

Daniel 7:9-14. After the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel is shown an incredible vision. He sees thrones established in heaven and the Ancient of Days takes one throne. The Aramaic term *עֲתִיק יוֹמִין* (*atik yomin*, ancient of days) only occurs in the book of Daniel, which is understandable as half the book is written in Aramaic. Many Jewish commentators of antiquity struggled with the idea of 'thrones' in heaven. The Aramaic word for throne is in the plural, and while that does not indicate an actual number, plural nouns in Aramaic and Hebrew are how you indicate there is a double of something. Thus the Jewish understanding is that there are two thrones in heaven. Shouldn't there only be one throne in heaven? And that's the one that God sits on. So the question for early rabbis was: who is sitting on the other throne? Rabbi Akiva (c. 130) declared that there were two powers in heaven: one was God and the other was the Messiah. Daniel does not literally use the word Messiah; instead, he describes the Son of Man (a term used in the Gospels more than 80 times) as the one who comes into God's presence to receive his kingdom. The kingdom that the Son of Man receives is a universal kingdom spanning all peoples and enduring forever.

Psalm 93. There is no title to this psalm in Hebrew. It is a short declaration of God's authority and kingship. It begins simply by proclaiming that God reigns. Some of the imagery in the psalm includes water and floods, alluding to the deep waters of creation and the unfathomable power of the sea. The sea was a powerful mystery to the people of antiquity. The sea provided food and opportunity for travel and trade. It was also unruly, uncontrollable, potentially violent and dangerous, and no one knew what lived beneath its depths. Even today, 80 per cent of the ocean remains uncharted and unexplored.¹ As

¹ US Department of Commerce, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. "How Much of the Ocean Have We Explored?" Accessed November 11, 2021. <https://oceanservice.noaa.gov/facts/exploration.html>.

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26th Sunday after Pentecost – Year B

powerful as the ocean is, God is mightier for he made it. As the creator, God rules over all of the universe. His throne was established in eternity. This is a prayer of certainty that can be comforting when declaring these truths in an uncertain world. Uncertainty can cause tremendous anxiety and a fear of the unknown. It is helpful and a blessing to be reminded that God is ruling and reigning, and we should be proclaiming Christ as King every day.

About the author. The Rev. Aaron Eime is the deacon at Christ Church Jerusalem and teacher for CMJ Israel. Aaron studied in the master’s program at Hebrew University with a focus on early Jewish and Christian interpretation of the Bible. He also studied psychology and sociology at Queensland University in Australia. Aaron is a dedicated Bible teacher exploring the Hebraic roots of the Christian faith. He reads Aramaic and ancient Greek and is fluent in German and Hebrew. He has taught internationally, including in Europe, North America, Hong Kong, and China. He lives in Jerusalem with his wife and three children.