

November 22, 2009
Christ the King Sunday
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Have you accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior? Wow! Where did that come from? It doesn't seem like the kind of question a Lutheran would ask; certainly not a progressive Lutheran like me.

In fact, I don't know about you but the question itself makes me quite uncomfortable. It always has. In part because of the cultural assumptions that are inherent in the question—that those who have accepted Jesus did the “right” thing, that doing so is the only way to get to heaven, that there is a right and wrong way to be a Christian. But most bothersome to me has always been the assumption that I have to do anything at all. Good ol' Lutheran theology has taught me over the years that I cannot by my own reasoning or understanding accept Jesus, but that he has claimed me, welcomed me, named me in baptism. You see, the emphasis is on God's work in us, not what we have done or not done to accept it.

But what if the well known question were rephrased just a little bit? What if, instead, we asked each other, the church, ourselves, “What does it mean if Jesus Christ is Lord?” What does it mean to acknowledge Christ as King in our lives, as the one who reigns over heaven and earth?

Now those are radically different questions and ones that can move us beyond right/wrong, heaven/hell and into a new vision of what it means to be a Christian. Christ the King Sunday (now becoming commonly known as Reign of Christ) is the one Sunday each year that we devote to examining what it means to have Christ as the center of our lives, the one who leads us in daily living and serving. When we recognize Jesus as king of our lives, as the leader we dare to follow, everything changes. We become a counter-cultural people who arm ourselves with love and peace, who seek to be good stewards of every good gift, who love our neighbors, and who are bold to pray “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”

People who live and pray this way have a very different agenda; whether Republican or Democrat, whether capitalist, socialist or communist, whether democratic or theocratic, we who pray this prayer have entered a kingdom and pledged our allegiance to a different kind of ruler and submitted to the reign of Christ the king.

Jesus never claims to be a king of any sort. But in the passage we read today Pilate says to Jesus, “Are you the king of the Jews?” and Jesus replies, “My kingdom is not of this world.” In its simplest terms, the kingdom of God that Jesus announced and embodied is what life would be like on earth, here and now, if God were king and the rulers of this world were not (Borg, Crossan). Imagine if God ruled the nations, and not Obama, Kim Jong-il, Mugabe, or Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Every aspect of personal and communal life would experience a radical reversal. The political, economic, and social subversions would be almost endless—peace-making instead of war mongering, liberation not exploitation, sacrifice rather than subjugation, mercy not vengeance, care for the vulnerable instead of privileges for the powerful, generosity instead of greed, humility rather than arrogance, embrace rather than exclusion. The ancient Hebrews had a marvelous word for this, shalom, or human well-being. (Dan Clendenin, *Journey with Jesus*)

Imagine a world of true shalom and what our living would be like if Christ really did reign, if we who say Christ is Lord of our whole lives really believed it and lived in such a way that embodied a radical bold reversal to the way we live now.

I asked a few Facebook friends about whether the reign of Christ was even possible and if so, when? Is it possible only in the future, in the spiritual realm in the life after death? Or is it possible now, and if so, in what ways do we experience it now? I loved the conversation that followed and want to share with you a bit of what my friends shared with me.

One friend said, “Yes, I do believe it's possible, but not for a long, long time, because it would take a massive shift in our collective human thinking, action and intention that I just don't see happening.”

Another friend said, “Yes I do believe that Christ's reign is not only possible but is here and will inevitably be. Jesus said his reign is like yeast in the dough—a little goes a long way and works its way into the whole dough. The Spirit's work in human hearts throughout the centuries has moved people to create and reform structures and attitudes directed at God's will of love and justice for all of creation.

There is much in the world that does not reflect God's reign--racism, war, materialism, homophobia--to name a few. Unfortunately some of these evils have been and are taken up by people who profess Christ as well. But the yeast continues to bubble and will keep on working to make the dough rise to its fullness.

Will we ever get there? Will God's will finally be done on earth as in heaven? As saints who are also sinners, we will never finish the job. We read in Revelation that it will be up to the returning Jesus, God's Lamb to do away with the violence and the hatred of the world--to establish a reign where "Christ is all in all."

Several friends gave examples of the ways they see Christ reigning in this broken world. We only need to keep our hearts and minds open to the many ways Christ's vision of wholeness, justice, and true shalom are breaking in bit by bit so that God's will may be done on earth as it is in heaven.

- *I see signs of Christ's reign anytime and anywhere people resist the addictions of the world--whenever people stand up against war, materialism, poverty--the dehumanization of people due to politics and economic greed.*
- *I see it when families are reconciled after many years of being separated, but now are sharing peace, love and care for a family member who is dying and in need of a tender presence in their final days.*
- *That we now consider slavery and racism abhorrent, contrary to much of our human history was the work of many people of God working together to bring about the true reign of Christ.*
- *I see Christ's reign when the arts are directed at something higher and more ennobling than some of the crass entertainment we are subjected to on television or radio.*
- *We are witnesses to God's reign in every child and adult baptized into Christ--one more individual whom God has claimed. As a communion assistant I see it in the lines of people coming forward every Sunday to receive the Body and Blood of Christ--taking advantage of God's promises to forgive and strengthen us to serve as God's representatives--the ambassadors of Christ's reign.*
- *Much of the advancement of civil rights and ecological concerns has been led or moved by Church people working to bring about shalom for all of humanity and the earth.*

We are bold to pray this day and every day, "Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." As we pray may our eyes be opened to the many ways Christ reigns among us now. And may we be emboldened to act in new ways, maybe even subversive radical ways, so that the next time someone asks us, "Is Jesus your Lord and Savior?" we can answer with confidence that Christ is the one who leads and loves us into action on behalf of those who are hurting, vulnerable, and broken. Because his kingdom is bringing shalom that the world cannot offer, we are able with open eyes and hearts to see glimpses of heaven right here on earth.