

Lord, give me a grateful heart.

Christ the King Sunday/Thanksgiving (Rev 1:4b-8)

These past weeks we've been looking at the church year and taken up heaven and hell and apocalyptic. Now we come to the sum of it all: Rev 1:4b & 8:

"He who is and who was and who is to come. . . . 'I am the Alpha and the Omega,' says the Lord God, who is, and who and who is to come, the Almighty."

Ho hum. Is this relevant? Very relevant! He is the Almighty, the Lord!

Rom 11:33-4:

"O the depths of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! 'For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?'"

He even creates out of nothing. Rom 4:17: ". . . who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist."

But on this Sunday we say: What about Thursday? Our minds and plans are focused on Thanksgiving. It's not a religious holiday. It's like Memorial Day. It's a time to look at the world around us: "The world is so full of a number of things, I'm sure we should all be as happy as kings." So wrote Robert Louis Stevenson, in *A Child's Garden of Verses*. The world is a place of infinite delight for children to play hide and go seek, climb trees, make angels in the snow.

Look at nature. We're in awe. Yet, "beauty is in the eye of the beholder." Even when we sing, "How Great Thou Art," it is limited by "how" we are looking:

O Lord my God, when I in awesome wonder
Consider all the worlds thy hands hath made,
I see the stars, I hear the rolling thunder,
Thy pow'r throughout the universe displayed.
Then sings my soul, my Savior God, to thee,
How great thou art! How great thou art!

2. But today is Thanksgiving. This is the Great Thanksgiving. As T.S. Eliot wrote in *Four Quartets*: "the still point in a turning world." Eliot was not referring to Jesus Christ. Yet this phrase describes how Christ is Lord in this world of chaos and confusion.

How is Christ the still point? Paul shows how in Phil 2:5-11 (here 6-8):

". . . who though he was in the form of God did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the

likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on the cross."

And in 2 Cor 8:9: "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich."

And also: "How Great Thou Art." Vs 3:

'But when I think that God his Son not sparing,
Sent him to die, I scarce can take it in,
That on the cross my burden gladly bearing
He bled and died to take away my sin."

3. Therefore "Rejoice. . . . with thanksgiving."

Phil 4:4-7: "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. . . . Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God."

2 Cor 9:8: "And God who is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that you may always have enough of everything and may provide in abundance for every good work."

How do we rejoice with thanksgiving? Centuries ago there was a Jewish custom which was to name 100 blessings by sundown every day. That could be more than an empty ritual. We have the song: "Count your blessings," the refrain of which is: "Count your blessings, name them one by one; count your blessings, see what God has done."

Psalms 136 has 26 verses and the second half of every verse is refrain: "For his mercy endures forever." That's in the KJV. In the RSV it reads: "For his steadfast love endures forever." Why the difference? The Hebrew word "chesed" means unlimited love toward someone, and our word for "love" has become very confused.

It used to be common to have a table grace at the beginning of a meal together. Many families still do. In a previous generation some also ended each meal with Psalm 136:1: "O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever." Or a family might end dinner by praying The Lord's Prayer together.

4. Give me one more thing, give me a grateful heart

George Herbert, the 17th century poet, wrote the following famous lines in his poem, "Gratefulness": "Thou hast given so much to me, give one more thing, a grateful heart."

It's like Psalm 136:1: "O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever."

We give thanks and praise. We sing Holy, Holy, Holy. Give glory, wonder, awe.

We are struck dumb. We don't know what to say. As Paul writes in 2 Cor 9:15: "Thanks be to God for his unspeakable gift!" That's the KJV. In the RSV it reads "Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!" The KJV isn't used, but its translation is the way to say it: "God's unspeakable gift!" It means that it is beyond all that we can ask or think.

As in Eph 3:20:

- "Now to him who is able to do **exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think** . . . (KJV) ("Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think . . ." RSV)

Lord, give me a grateful heart. Amen