

## **Christ is King, and beside him there is no other**

Revelation 1:4b-8; John 18:33-37

A Sermon for Christ the King Sunday

In the church year today is New Year's Eve, a time for celebration. The new year begins next Sunday, the first Sunday of Advent. As we typically do on New Year's Eve, we take stock of what has been and look ahead at what is to come.

Along with looking back, we look forward to Advent, which tells us about God coming to help us, and then Christmas, which is pointing to Good Friday and Easter, where God solves the problem and then sends his Holy Spirit who leads us and guides us as individuals and Christians together to the end of the next year.

As we know, to speak of "the end" has two meanings. It means "termination," and it also means "goal." At the end of the church year, as on New Year's Eve, we think of the people who have died this past year. We also think of the fact that things will come to an end for us individually, and that this world is not forever but also comes to an end at some point in time. God the Creator who made the earth is also the Lord who brings it to an end.

Then there's the second meaning of "the end" as "the goal." The goal for you and me individually is significantly pointed out by the fact that the Lord has made us his own in Baptism. We are his adopted children. We have our goal in him and so does the cosmos. After all, he is Lord of the whole cosmos. Therefore, he brings it all to its fulfillment and goal because he made it.

As Revelation 1:4b-8 states: "Grace and peace to you from him who is and who was and who is to come. . . . Jesus Christ . . . the firstborn of the dead, the ruler of the kings on earth. . . . 'I am the Alpha and the Omega,' says the Lord God, who is, and who and who is to come, the Almighty."

In our Gospel text today, John 18:33-37, Jesus is brought before Pilate, and he and Pilate question each other (paraphrase):

Pilate: "Are you king of the Jews?"

Jesus: "Are you saying this of your own accord, or because of others?"

Pilate: "Am I a Jew? Your own people handed you over. What have you done?"

Jesus: "My kingship is not of this world."

Pilate: "So you are a king?"

Jesus: "You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. . . ."

Pilate: "What is truth?"

That's where it ends: "What is truth?" The answer is, of course, that truth is not a set of doctrines; truth is a person. As John 14:6 states: "Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me.'" John 8:36: "[Y]ou shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free."

He is King of kings and Lord of lords. Psalm 93: "The Lord reigns; he is robed in majesty . . . holiness befits thy house, O Lord, for evermore." Psalm 95:3 states: "For the Lord is a great God, and a great King above all gods." We know that and when we hear the phrase "Lord of lords, and King of Kings," we can't help but sing that great stanza from Handel's Messiah: "King of kings, and Lord of Lords, and He shall reign forever and ever. Hallelujah!" (Hallelujah seven times).

The Lord is our Maker, our Creator, the one who is in charge. When Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15 about the end, he does two significant things. In 1 Corinthians 15:26 he writes: "The last enemy to be destroyed is death." That's counter-intuitive. It goes against what people commonly think, namely that death is normal, just one of those things. But that was not in God's original plan.

In his original plan there was to be no death, and we remember that sin, death, and the devil are all the same thing. But because of sin, the Lord made a plan B, a plan to solve the problem himself, and so he did that on the cross. In his new kingdom to come, death is no more.

Then Paul concludes in 1 Corinthians 15:28: "When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things under him, that God may be everything to everyone." The Lord will be Lord. He is Lord, and it is great that we are his because he is Lord and not somebody else.

And his kingdom is forever, as Daniel 7:13-14 says:

"[To him is] given dominion and glory and kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed."

Finally, it is appropriate to think of the petition in the Lord's Prayer: "Thy kingdom come." As Luther writes: "God's kingdom comes by itself, without our prayer, but we pray in this petition that it may also come to us."

He goes on in the Large Catechism to say that this is the most important petition because when his kingdom comes, that is everything.

The Lord's Prayer goes on to say: "Thy will be done." That's important for us because we basically say: "My will be done."

Luther's explanation goes on to say: "To be sure, the good and gracious will of God is done without our prayer, but we pray that it may also be done by us." We celebrate the fact that he is the King who brings in his kingdom and his will is done.

This brings us to the conclusion to the Lord's Prayer: "For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever."

Traditionally, Roman Catholics did not use that final verse. They ended the Lord's Prayer as Matthew 6:13 does: "deliver us from evil. Amen."

Some early Christians added the final verse ("For thine is the kingdom . . ."), and Protestants have followed that tradition. Today Catholics go along with Protestants on this matter because, of course, Catholics also affirm that his is the kingdom and the power and the glory.

When we pray the Lord's Prayer, we are confessing and affirming that his is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever.

It concludes, as we know, with "Amen," which means Yes! It is true! We acclaim that God's kingdom and power and glory are forever and ever and so we say Amen.

Or to put it another way, as Paul does in 2 Corinthians 1:20: "For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why we utter the Amen through him, to the glory of God."

This is what we celebrate as we come to the end of the whole account from the first of Advent to the end of the church year: Christ is King of kings and Lord of lords, and "all the promises of God find their Yes in him." Amen