

[BLANK] [PRAYER] Good morning! I hope and pray that everyone had a Thanksgiving filled with blessings. I also hope that we will continue to pray for people in our homes, our community, our nation, and our world, who had a hard time celebrating Thanksgiving due to tragic losses in their lives. We are blessed simply by being able to come here to this place, to worship in a beautiful church that is fairly warm, and to know that there will be enjoyable food and beverages for our time afterwards. In a world that needs our ministries more than ever, we thank God for the grace that we find in this place.

One grace in this place is being surrounded by images of Jesus, our Christ, our savior, our king of kings. In every window of our sanctuary, the lordship of Christ is proclaimed, with images of his face, or symbols that stand for the essence of who Christ is. What is wonderful about these windows is that they reveal Christ as a very humble king. [WINDOW1] We see Jesus inviting a child into his lap in the circle window above our organ. [WINDOWS] We see Jesus in various stages of his life in the side windows of this place, as a baby, as a young man, as a teacher. [WINDOWS2] On the rear wall, we see Jesus kneeling humbly in a garden, praying to God the Creator to find the willingness to do God's will upon the cross, for the sake of all of God's Creation. And in our balcony is Jesus, the good shepherd, leading his flock forward, a humble king, filled with the power of amazing grace. [BLANK]

I trust that this pattern for our beautiful stained glass windows was intentional. It helps us to see our own paths in discipleship very clearly. We start out as children, coming to Jesus with open hearts. We mature in the arms of our parents, who we hope will nurture our faith. We mature in our faith, as we grow. And then comes a knee-bending moment when we turn our lives over to God, when we know that there can be no way forward for us but through faith. It is through this moment that God calls us to become true disciples of Jesus, learning how to shepherd others in Jesus, as people have shepherded us in Jesus.

This is a beautiful way to look at our path of faith as Christians, Amen? I hope that you use these beautiful windows to consider where you are in your own path of discipleship. We are now at the end of the Christian year, preparing for our season of Advent, in the new Christian year. We are at the end of Pentecost, the season of God's Holy Spirit, when God has been inviting us to grow into the image of Christ, until, finally, today, on Christ the King Sunday, we proclaim Christ as the king of our hearts, our minds, our lives, and of all of Creation. Like these windows, our Christian year is a pattern that helps us to grow in our discipleship, until Christ is truly our king.

Yet for some people, the image of Christ as a king bothers them. We live in a time when dictators and tyrants are on the rise all over the world. People are placing the leaders of our great institutions under the microscope, questioning their motives, and how they have used or abused their power and authority. And in this challenge to power and authority, many people have become suspicious of not only churches in their minds and hearts, but also the authority and power of faith itself.

Like in John's gospel reading today, where Pontius Pilate questioned Jesus,

before Pilate sent Jesus to his death on a cross, the world questions the idea of Christ being a king. There is a fear of Christ being a king, it seems. We like the idea of Jesus as a kind and cuddly God. We like the idea of a God who dies for us, and who empowers us as shepherds. We claim, in our nation's pledge of allegiance, that we want "one nation, under God" - a pledge for Christians that Christ is a king above and beyond human politics. But do we really want Christ as our king? Do we really want Christ to reign as our lord and our king over our minds, our hearts, and our lives?

This is the fundamental question that our Christian year is designed to help us answer. Our Christian discipleship, that we live out through our Christian year, asks us to learn who we are with Christ as our king. As our year of Christian discipleship ends, are we closer to having Christ as our king? Did our story change in God's story? If not, we have a new Christian year for Christ to be born again as our king. The story of Christ as king never ends.

This is why I feel a deep sense of privilege for having my desk in our balcony under the highest and final window in our church. [WINDOW] It is a simple, round window, with the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, "Alpha" and "Omega," wrapped around each other. This is the final picture of Jesus in Christian discipleship. This is accepting Christ as our king in a story of faith that never ends. Christ is the beginning and the ending of all stories of true faith in God. As Jesus says in today's reading from Revelation, "I am the Alpha and the Omega...the one who is and was and is coming."

[BLANK] About sixty years after the resurrection of Jesus, a disciple of Jesus had a vision of the final ending to God's story. His name was John. John was living at a time when Christians were still few and far between, and beginning to experience more and more persecution from the rulers of the world, who feared Christ as a king. John had given his life completely to Christ. Christ truly was king of John's heart, and Christ wanted John to see the ultimate ending to God's story. And so, John received a vision from God, and assembled this vision into the Bible book we call Revelation. It is the final book in our Christian bible. Its inclusion in our Bible was controversial for many years. Some thought that it was just a vision for a specific time in human history. But as time went on, people began to realize that Revelation was God's ultimate story for the ages. You see, at the end of John's revelation, Creation is born anew. Jerusalem, the holy city of God, is born anew. The old story of the world of sin ends, and a new story of faith begins. Even at the end of the world's story, God's story in Jesus never ends.

For some people, the book of Revelation has a reputation of being a dark book, a scary book, a book about death and endings. For people of faith, nothing could be further from the truth. John's revelation is meant to prepare people of faith for the final joy of Christ as king of kings, now, and forever. When everything looks dark, and gloomy, and defeated on this earth, the book of Revelation asks us to look up, and to look beyond the story of human history, and to see a new story beginning just when we think that history is ending. [CLOUDS] "Look!," John says in today's reading, "he is coming, among the clouds!" People of faith will rejoice! People who worshiped only the kings of the world

will despair, because they will realize that just one story wins: God's story.

If you have made Christ your king, if you have seated the love, the mercy, the justice, the healing, the transformation that comes from God only through our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, as the throne for your king, then the ending of God's story will be a time of joy, no matter what we go through to get to it. Every battle that the evils of the earth can throw at us will melt away, like the clouds of the earth. The invitation from God to witness the start of God's new story, filled with the glory of God, made of precious treasures that only God's love provides, will fill our hearts with joy, not dread. When God wins the story of our lives, all other victories are empty, at best. [BLANK]

The ending of God's story is always the same: God wins, and Christ is king. God's love wins, and Christ, who rules over heaven and earth in everlasting love, is king of kings, now and forever. Did this story become our story this year? Is Christ our king? Is Christ your king? Is Christ going to be your king again in a new year of Christian discipleship, a new chapter in your life? Our lives change. Our discipleship needs to grow, again and again, into the image of Christ. The king who we needed to reign in our hearts this year must be born and grow again, and again, until the end of our time, and until the end of all time. And we need to invite more people to be born into God's story through Christian faith, until the end of time. The never-ending story of Christ must grow, forever.

Look! He is coming, in the clouds. And he will appear to us, in just a few weeks, in a manger, again; humble, again, as we must become humble, again, like Jesus, to begin, again and again, God's never-ending story. Amen.