

## Reign of Christ Sunday

Wicker Park Lutheran church

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November 20<sup>th</sup>, 2016

I'm uncomfortable. It's not only that Thanksgiving with my politically divided family is this week. It's more than last Thursday's high temperature of 72 followed by last night's low of 27. I'm most uncomfortable with the title of today's feast day. Here we use title "The Reign of Christ," and, to be clear, that's "reign" as in ruling with authority, not "rain" as in precipitation from the sky. As a title, The Reign of Christ communicates power. So on this Sunday I'd expect us to read about when Jesus flipped tables in the synagogue, or raised someone from the dead, or the miracle of water turned into wine. Instead, we got the crucifixion story from Luke. It's an uncomfortable and seemingly odd scene to read as we gear up for the holidays.

It's also strange that the word "Christ" is not mentioned in any of our readings. It is "The Reign of *Christ*" Sunday, after all - why not use the word? By the way, Christ is a title and not a name - it's like "Mr." or "Mrs." Christ means "Anointed One." Those anointed are set apart for something holy; in other words, set apart for something that belongs to God. Knowing that Jesus had the title Christ helps cue us into the way he responded and how that response belongs to God.

So, what *is* Jesus's response, anyway? We can look to the reading from Colossians for the answer. In Colossians, we're reminded that, "through [Christ Jesus] God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross." Wait, God reconciled all things through the cross? An execution brought reconciliation?

That feels uncomfortable.

But who said that reconciliation is comfortable? Reconciliation is about restoring a relationship, and this restoration requires us to examine our brokenness. Reconciliation forces us to look at power and privilege. It requires that we give something up. Reconciliation is uncomfortable.

It's a good thing that it's just for Jesus, right? Wrong! In our baptisms we too have been anointed. You might be thinking, "Oh no, this is getting real." Yep – let's do this. In baptism we anoint the head of the newly baptized with a cross of oil. In baptism we're reminded that we are God's beloved children, and that nothing can separate us from God's love. We are set apart as something special, something holy, and something that is of God. If we are anointed, then we too have the title of "Christ." We have Christ Jason, Christ Ashlee, Christ Cathi, Christ Rob, Christ Janet. We are a part of the reign of Christ.

How do we participate in this reign, though? Well, first we need to understand reality. For example, there's a church on the west side of Chicago that welcomes short-term mission trips. Generally, white congregations come to serve in a black community for a week. One particular group arrived and asked a black woman they met to speak with "Austen." When she told them she was Austen, their entire demeanor changed. It got so bad that the group left after twelve hours into their seven-day stay. Reflecting on this group Austen is certain that they expected a white male given her name. When they realized she was neither white nor male their expectations were shattered and distrust set in. Austen believes that if she had been a man she would have engendered more credibility and trust.

We, too, as a people get caught up in mismatched expectations. We let the media, cultural stereotypes, our pride, and our privilege get in our way. To listen and trust is uncomfortable. It's much easier to blame the victim. We try to say that if only that woman had dressed appropriately

then he wouldn't have been tempted. If those people had only stabilized their government they wouldn't be refugees. If those homeless people would just get a job then they'd have something to eat. If she wouldn't wear that headscarf then she wouldn't need triple screening. If that black man had shut his mouth he wouldn't have been shot. We blame the victim.

Then we come here on Sunday and we lie to ourselves. We pray the Lord's Prayer without intentionality. Instead, we think about brunch or we're angry about the sermon. So we mumble the words "your kingdom come, and your will be done on earth" and then we move on. We don't really care. We don't really want God's kingdom to come and reign. We don't want to embrace our anointing. Instead, we sit and wait for God to show up, and we forget that God is already here; that God is among us and in us; that the reign of Christ is now; and that the reign of Christ looks like the crucifixion of our own pride and self-righteous expectations.

Hear again the words from Colossians: "Through [Christ Jesus] God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross."

As a "Reconciling in Christ" congregation this is our work. It is not something we must do to earn God's favor. Rather, it is an opportunity for us to respond to God's gifts of love and grace. In 2006 our congregation affirmed that, "As a community of the people of God, we are called to minister to all people in our world. We are called to reconciliation and wholeness and are challenged by the Gospel to be agents of healing within our society."<sup>1</sup>

I love that phrase: "challenged by the Gospel to be agents of healing within our society." You see, The Reign of Christ reminds us that we are called to engage in the entire world. We're called to let our beliefs in both justice and peace inform our choices. We're called to let our values

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<sup>1</sup> WPLC's Affirmation of Welcome

of love and service become the response to our neighbors. And when confronted with fear and hate, we're called to let our belief in resurrection and new life act as the final word.

But what does that mean for us? If we're honest, sitting in Wicker Park carries privilege. Most of us won't go hungry. Most of us are doing well. That's not a bad thing. Yet, we need to recognize that it will be uncomfortable for us to step into the reconciling work around sexism, heterosexism, racism, ableism, Islamaphobia, and ageism. To confront a society that justifies the consumption of someone's body for one-sided sexual pleasure will be difficult. To view natural resources as gift instead of with greedy eyes will be a challenge.

And frankly, I'm not sure what it will take for a shift. Yet, I have a hunch that reconciliation will look like us confronting and using our privilege in uncomfortable ways. It might look like us confronting the fact that the world has been revolving around us. It might mean that we must own how past and present elected leaders devalue the land and religions of indigenous peoples. It might mean putting our privilege to work by engaging in politics. It might look like using our privilege to work for justice. Perhaps we'll need to use our social capital to call out hurtful and generalizing rhetoric. You know, it might just look like nailing to the cross a bit of our self-interest so that another might live.

Well, there it is – Jesus's crucifixion is uncomfortable, and so is reconciliation. As God's anointed people we are sent to respond in love and humility. That is good news! For we are not just subject to whatever happens, but rather we are participants in God's reign of love. You see, the Reign of Christ is not something in the future; for, like that criminal on the cross, today we are with Christ in paradise. Today we see God in the places of hurt and despair. Today God is present when we use our power in uncomfortable and life-giving ways. Today we see Christ reigning in a whole new way. Amen.