

Sermon "The Light of Morning"  
Scripture Readings: II Samuel 23:1-7, John 18:33-37  
Christ the King Sunday, November 25, 2018  
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Today, we conclude the Christian liturgical year on Christ the King Sunday. This Sunday marks the occasion of the last words we speak before the new church year is upon us in the Season of Advent.

In our first scripture reading, II Samuel 23:1-7, David's last words reflect on his reign as King and celebrate God's everlasting covenant with his household. We learn through this oracle that David's reign was only as successful as it was just, humble, and kind. This is what the Lord requires! The combination of images relating to truth and light are especially fitting in the coming celebration of Advent and Christmas. Listen for the Word of God.

*Now these are the last words of David: The oracle of David, son of Jesse, the oracle of the man whom God exalted, the anointed of the God of Jacob, the favorite of the Strong One of Israel:*

*<sup>2</sup> The spirit of the LORD speaks through me, God's word is upon my tongue.*

*<sup>3</sup> The God of Israel has spoken, the Rock of Israel has said to me:*

*One who rules over people justly, ruling in the fear of God,*

*<sup>4</sup> is like the light of morning, like the sun rising on a cloudless morning,  
gleaming from the rain on the grassy land.*

*<sup>5</sup> Is not my house like this with God?*

*For God has made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and secure. Will God not cause to prosper all my help and my desire?<sup>6</sup> But the godless are all like thorns that are thrown away; for they cannot be picked up with the hand; <sup>7</sup> to touch them one uses an iron bar or the shaft of a spear. And they are entirely consumed in fire on the spot. Amen.*

Our second scripture reading is John 18:33-37. During this interaction with Pilate in the early morning, Jesus reaches out to Pilate with whom he comes face to face and offers some final words about his kingship before he embraces the cross. This is the word of God.

*<sup>33</sup> Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" <sup>34</sup> Jesus answered, "Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?" <sup>35</sup> Pilate replied, "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?" <sup>36</sup> Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here." <sup>37</sup> Pilate asked him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice." Amen.*

The title of the Sermon: “The Light of Morning”

*Text: One who rules over people justly is like the light of morning, like the sun rising on a cloudless morning, gleaming from the rain on the grassy land. II Samuel 23:3a,4*

Let us pray: Holy and loving God, thank you for those who are like the light of morning in the way they lead. And now, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of each of our hearts be acceptable in your sight. Amen.

This week Peter and I had the privilege of meeting our great nieces and nephew in New Orleans where we spent Thanksgiving with the extended Kieffer Family. It was good to be around toddlers and infants and to remember the days on Hanley Road in Clayton when our son Paul would greet us in the early mornings.

I have vivid memories of the sound of little footsteps running down the hall toward our bedroom and climbing into our bed snuggling behind me. “Mom,” he would routinely say, “please turn around and face me.” Happy to respond to this familiar request, I would turn my face toward Paul and say “You feel more safe when you see my face, don’t you?” “Yes.” He would say and soon he would be fast asleep.

This personal experience with Paul shed some light on a sermon illustration I had heard years earlier at Fourth Presbyterian Church in Chicago while I was serving as a Chaplain at Children’s Memorial Hospital. It was the Reverend Dr. John Boyle, Associate Pastor and Pastoral Counselor, who shared this story from the pulpit.

“A mother was trying to console her little girl who was afraid to be left alone in the dark. The mother said, ‘Dear One, don’t be afraid, you know that you are not alone. God is with you.’ To this the little girl replied, ‘Yes, but I need a God with a face.’”

I imagine this mother held and faced her little girl that night until she fell asleep and in that moment, in her care, reflected the face of a loving God. I also imagine that in the process of growing up this little girl experienced nights of being alone in the dark when her mother or father was not there to hold her. ...She would have to learn as we all have had to learn to find the comfort of remembering the face of God in our mind’s eye until the light of morning comes.

We all need a God with a face, whether it is in the beginning of our young lives during the darkness of early mornings, in the middle of our lives when uncertainty and change dim our world, or at the end of our lives when the sun is setting, our work is done, and we are granted a resting place.

On this Christ the King Sunday we celebrate and proclaim the face of God in Jesus of Nazareth, who gathered little children in his arms, who calmed his friends and the sea during the turmoil of life’s storms, and who turned the world upside down in his presence because the face of God was like the light of morning, more kind and just than any imagined.

As we end one church year and begin another, we celebrate the One who is the alpha and the omega. These are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, building blocks for a language that evolved into the very foundation of who we understand Christ to be.

There was an ancient saying in Plato's time about the mythological god Zeus. "Zeus is the beginning and the middle and the end." In the Book of Revelation as the first century of the Common Era came to an end, John uses a familiar saying in his culture and places it in this new context in order to comfort believers who were being martyred for their faith and who believed the world was coming to an end.

To these faithful followers of Christ, the King, John affirms the majesty and power of Christ. He proclaims that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus—not even death. For Christ conquered death by dying on a cross. The Risen Christ is the light of the morning, the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end. Christ was, Christ is, and Christ is to come.

In the face of Christ, we see a God who not only is, we see a God who is for us. In the ups and downs of life, in the changing world around us there is well-being and confidence in God's dependable, unchanging being. As the author of Hebrews put it, God is "the same yesterday, today and forever." (Hebrews 13:8) To proclaim that God is unchangeable is to affirm that God is accountable, unfailing, reliable, consistent, and steadfast. God's love is as trustworthy as the light of morning.

Because God's love is unchanging we can risk the changes in our own lives and the seasons of our lives; some that we choose, some that evolve naturally, and some that are uninvited intrusions because of circumstances beyond our control. Because we believe in a God who is for us, we can even endure those times of monotony when we long for a change, for the end of one season and the beginning of another within our lives. So wherever each of us is today in the seasons of our lives, in the beginnings and the endings, we can find strength in the God whose character and face we have witnessed in the face of a just king.

Like the path of the sun, whose course determines the tides of life, a just King nurtures those whom God entrusts to him. When Jesus came face to face with Pilate before he was sentenced to death, his last words in the early morning shed light on the truth he brought into the world...the truth about who God is and his role as the just king.

Jesus offered Pilate the opportunity to embrace that truth just as he offers each one of us. This is always Jesus' invitation. However, to receive it, to come face to face with a loving, kind, and just God means facing the truth about ourselves and our need for God. It means listening to the voice of Christ, which beckons and calls each of us as surely as the morning greets the rising sun. Amen.