

St James United Church



Message for November 23, 2025

Reign of Christ Sunday

“Called to the Rule of Love” - Preached by Rev. James Ravenscroft

Jeremiah 23:1-6; Luke 4:14-22; Excerpt, C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Touchstone, 1996), 190-191

Today as we mark Reign of Christ Sunday, we come to the end of the church year and with it the end of twelve months of reflecting mostly on Luke’s gospel. As we do, it felt appropriate for us to return to the beginning of his narrative about Jesus, giving us a chance to hear it again through the experience of all the other stories we have heard. In it, Jesus is between two moments. The first is his baptism by John in which following his experience of God’s claim of him as a beloved son, he is led by the Spirit into the wilderness to discern its meaning and what God is asking of him in it. Then after what we heard, he is aided by some fishers as he preaches on the shore and invites them to share in God’s call to him. So, what is that call? That is the focus of our gospel.

In it Jesus was presented a scroll of the prophet Isaiah where he not only read how the Spirit of God had anointed the prophet to bring good news to the poor, release to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to announce the year of the Lord’s favour, but that those words were fulfilled in that moment, in him. The reaction was mixed, people inspired but reticent to imagine those things could happen through someone they knew. This is a key point I want you to hold on to. For the moment though, let’s consider the rest of Luke through what Jesus read. Multiple times, he fulfilled what he read in the scroll. He forgave those burdened by their past, healed those who were infirm, restored sight to the blind, affirmed the dignity of the impoverished, challenged those who hoarded wealth and power, enabled those excluded because of illness to return to their families, revealing what God’s Reign is like in what he did as he ate meals with “sinners” and included women among his disciples, and in what he said, challenging long-held understandings of God and what God’s Reign is about as for example he compared God to a father who called estranged brothers to reconcile and made a Samaritan, a historical enemy, the hero of a story about loving others. In these ways he made real Jeremiah’s prophecy about God giving the people a new shepherd, one who would rule justly. Everything he did revealed a kingship different than what he saw in his world and we see in ours, his focus on those he was called to serve, lifting them up in love and caring rather than shoring up power and prestige.

Jesus speaks to how he will do this in another gospel, in John’s, when he calls himself the good shepherd and says that this shepherd is willing to lay down his life for his sheep. This points to the cross, Jesus accepting death and so revealing the fullness of his love, God’s love too. Jesus accepts being a scapegoat, judged for what he taught about God and God’s Reign. In this he freely takes on the anger and fear of others, and rather than deflecting it back as we often do, he

takes it in, absorbs it, forgives it, shows us that the only way we can break the cycle of violence and hate infecting our world is to respond with understanding and love. When we do this, we make possible the reign he both lived and taught, and invited his disciples into living as well.

It is a challenge though, because our instinct is not to absorb others' anger and fear, not to respond with compassion and caring, but to deflect and respond with the same. The result is a world where for example soldiers are deployed against citizens and a leader facing protests releases a video of him flying a plane saying he's king as he dumps sewage on the protestors. That response makes sense in a reactive world that refuses to apply the true lesson of the cross, and when leaders do point to the cross, they twist it, make allegiance to their interpretation of it a way to divide people into camps and scatter them like the shepherds in Jeremiah. If the cross is to lead us to God's Reign, it does by confronting us with how far from God's way we've drifted, the shock of Jesus' death, joined to the power of the resurrection, converting our hearts and enabling us to live as he lived and taught, take on his heart of understanding and love, his heart ours through the gifting of the Spirit. It is the only way we'll truly share in his call, a call that starts with him ruling our hearts.

This is the point C.S. Lewis makes in what we read from *Mere Christianity*. We are called to let go of ourselves and let Jesus take over. As long as we cling to ourselves, even as we try to apply his teachings in our lives and world, nothing really changes. This brings us back to the point about those who were inspired by Jesus but thought of him as Joseph's son. They were stuck in how things were. They couldn't imagine God working through Jesus, and so could not see God working in them either, God transforming their hearts. And when we react the same, we are tempted to make following Jesus an issue of the mind. Left in our heads, we filter his teachings through what we know, and we end up using his words to justify our biases and fears, affirm our assumptions about what God wants, all the things those who condemned Jesus were stuck on. Following him becomes a question of identity and not transformation. We just put a religious veneer on the status quo, giving us Christendom, then the church coopted into colonialism, now Christian nationalism, the cross wrapped in a flag with preachers saying things that fly in the face of all we read this past year.

Fortunately, God never stops reaching out to us through grace, inviting us to let go of ourselves and to take on Christ. We can respond to that grace in prayer, through practices like fasting, bible study, meditation. God is always reaching out, waiting for us to receive their love. That is what we celebrate as we begin a new church year next Sunday, lift up at Advent and Christmas. And in the year ahead, as we reflect on Matthew's gospel, we get a chance to meet Jesus in that word, get a chance to let what we read there take hold of our hearts and keep changing how we live in the world. The Reign of Christ we lift up today is born in us, grows in us each year as we respond to his invitation to not just accept that he is God's beloved Son and so was given a mission, but to participate with him in that anointing, in that call to live into God's Reign of love. May we respond. Amen.