

I am glad to be home after a rapid visit to my family in the UK. Of course, one person I did not see was my brother Richard who died quite a while back. Every Christmas, Richard faithfully sent out a Christmas letter with the normal kind of information about his family's activities. But Richard was not an optimist. Every year he told us that things were so bad that the end of the world was surely nigh and we might not be around to share Christmas letters again the following year.

After the news during these last few weeks, I am tempted to send out a similarly dismal letter.

We have seen tragedy upon tragedy – some that have affected entire communities, some which are more local, and some which are personal disasters. As if the shooting in Thousand Oaks and the fires were not enough, a young woman in her 20s driving under the influence killed the beloved pastor of Morro Bay Presbyterian Church, and then our friend and member JW was arrested. Although through the generosity of many of you he was initially able to post bond, on Monday his bail was raised to one million dollars and he will be in jail for the foreseeable future. This is a loss and a sadness for us. And then to top it all three scary reports about climate change came out, and the stock market dropped.

There is a lot to be sad and concerned about.

Today we celebrate the Reign of Christ. This final Sunday of the Church's year is when we remind ourselves that the God of Love really does get the final say.

Our gospel reading was taken from the middle of the account of a great tragedy. A tragedy that rocked the disciples' world. Jesus whom they loved, followed and revered as the Son of God was arrested and tried for blasphemy and sedition accused of having claimed to be the King of the Jews. With 20/20 hindsight we can see what this is leading up to; we know that resurrection will come. But the disciples didn't know it.

Jesus was facing Pilate, the representative of the Roman Emperor, who asked, “Are you the King of the Jews?” After a short exchange, “Pilate asked him [again], “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.””

When I read this passage, I am never sure about the intonation on that statement of Jesus’ “You say that I am a King” – should it be “*You* say that I am a king” or “You *say* that I am a king”? Reading it this year I wonder if it might be “You say that I am *a king*.” Was Jesus perhaps saying that the language describing him as a king was missing the mark? That we might call him a king but he wouldn’t use that term?

We often use the analogy of King to describe the role and the status of Jesus the Christ, especially in our hymns. But as we increasingly understand God to be imminent - within and through all things - not only transcendent- separate and different from creation, maybe Christ as King is no longer so helpful.

So what does Jesus offer in its place? “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,” he says. Which begs the question, what exactly is the truth to which Jesus is referring? This is of course John’s gospel with its idiosyncratic perspective, and so we can go back to the prologue where we find similar language. There we read that John the Baptizer “came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light.” (John 1:7,8) And it goes on to declare, about Jesus, that “to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God.” And a couple of chapters later John the Baptizer returns to this theme, “The one who comes from heaven is above all. He testifies to what he has seen and heard... He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without

measure. The Father loves the Son and has placed all things in his hands.” (John 3:31-35)

So the truth is that all things are placed in the hands of the Christ who gives us the power to also become the children of God. Which really is very similar to an earthly king except that Jesus does not hold on to his power but shares it with all who receive him. So the reign of Christ which we are celebrating today is a reign of shared power. An idea which is expressed in the reading from Revelation as he has “made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father.” (Rev 1: 6)

We are the reign of God, we are the royal priesthood of the One who is the Alpha and Omega - the A to Z, the beginning and the end and everything in the middle.

Which means that somehow everything that happens, good and bad, is held within the reign of the Christ. A reign in which we are empowered. We have been given power to become children of God, we have been made royal priests.

Let’s just explore that idea of priesthood for a moment. The priests of Jesus’ time offered sacrifices and prayers on behalf of the people, and were seen as servants of God. So if we are priests of the reign of Christ, then we get to serve at the altar of the great A to Z; we get to offer prayers on behalf of the whole of Creation. When we gather as the Body of Christ, the royal priesthood, to celebrate the sacrifice that God has made on our behalf we come not just for our own sakes but on behalf of the whole of Creation.

This is what we can do with the pain and suffering of our age – offer it up to God. For in some strange way that we cannot fully understand, in his suffering on the cross, Christ joined with the suffering of this world.

The Christ is inextricably involved in the pain we experience. And so we and all of Creation are also inextricably involved in the resurrection of the Christ.

There are many practical things that we can do to live the reign of Christ here and now. We can make sure that we are constantly bringing a little more beauty, a little more kindness and a lot less trash, carbon and methane into the part of the world that we inhabit. We can do all that we can to influence public policy for the good of all beings.

But these are things that anyone can do. Those of us who have enrolled in the reign of God have a special place, a special calling. As the priests of the great Alpha and Omega we are the ones who offer the pain and suffering of the world up to God minute by minute, day after day. All things, all beings are connected. As we allow ourselves to be transformed by the Holy Spirit so that we become more and more Christ-like, so we are transforming our world, as we offer the pain of Creation up to God we are working towards the resurrection of all that is.

And this is where we find hope. When Jesus was hauled before the Sanhedrin and then before Pilate, the disciples were distraught. This was not the way things were meant to go, all their hope died before their very eyes. But soon resurrection came. As we see things change around us. As the news seems to get worse every day, we have the hope of the resurrection. Resurrection will come. All things will be restored in the Christ. As the royal priest hood, the kin-dom of our great God let us intentionally practice the hope of the resurrection on behalf of all beings.