

There are a couple themes for this morning worship: Thanksgiving is the most obvious one, as we are all planning or wondering what we may be doing this coming Thursday. The Psalms always sing of Thanksgiving... or "Praise." But this Sunday is also the end of the Christian year, so it is called "Christ the King" Sunday, or in more modern language, the "*Reign of Christ Sunday*."

Let's start with the theme of Gratitude. Gratitude, (Thanksgiving) really is the first and foremost act of worship; most worship services start with a song of Praise. And that praise is to God. Why? Because we believe there must be a God who is a Creator, a Source of everything! And, as good as we all may be, as loving as we all think we are, we know we fall short of our own ideals; there must be a God who is "beyond" us, a love that is supreme, a steadfast love... that we can connect with and draw upon. If worship on a Saturday morning with our Jewish neighbors, we hear "Baruch Etah Adonai Elohenu" (Blessed are you, Lord our God), a praise to God, over and over through the entire Sabbath worship!

But... reality is that we are not always in a grateful mood, or as some preachers like to say: We need to develop an "attitude of gratitude!" I remember one parishioner used to say that cocktail hour was "attitude adjustment" time! An alcoholic drink, may indeed work to some extent. However, in the faith community, connecting with God, the spirit of love and grace, singing or praying that connection, is one great way of helping our attitude be one of gratitude!!!

Let me shift now to our other theme for this morning, The Reign of Christ, or Christ the King. Today, as in Jesus' day, there was a problem... of putting faith in a human as a supreme ruler. The Jews insisted that they wanted a king, so they could be like the other nations. They got their way, but then had plenty of bad luck; many kings did evil things. And the Romans called their kings emperors, the Egyptians called them Pharaohs. But the followers of Jesus were clear that Jesus was their only Lord, and they would not swear loyalty to any emperor. Jesus Christ as our only "king" holds true even today, as we state that Jesus Christ is the "head" of our church. "Crown him with Many Crowns, as we just sang, has the imagery of Jesus with a king's crown, but also refers to his crown of thorns. We are clear that Jesus is a different kind of king!

The life story of Jesus makes clear that his reign, his kingdom, has nothing to do with wealth or power, nothing to do with status or ability to dominate. Rather, Jesus is the Divine Presence that came to this world in the form of a baby, and when leaving this world, he rode to his death on a young donkey, clearly showing that he had not straightened out the world by force. Jesus accepted the human condition of vulnerability all of his life, and his rule was always one of Love.

So back to the topic of Gratitude. I believe that our focus on Jesus helps us to be grateful, because Jesus knows our every weakness; he lived a human life! This is the "Incarnation" that we celebrate a month from now... as the opening of the

gospel of John states: “The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us!” The Spirit of God entered the world of human flesh, and lived among us! Jesus, although one with God, was also one with us, experiencing love and loss, hope and despair, the highs and lows of being human.

When we need an attitude adjustment, we can remember that Jesus knows about our negative moods, knows about our mistakes, knows about injustices inflicted upon us, knows about our ailing bodies... and we can hear him still saying “Love the Lord your God, and love your neighbor as you love yourself.” We can hear him saying, “Father forgive them, for they know not what they do.” The spirit of Forgiveness (Grace) can be a sure attitude adjustment, since we can not only forgive our neighbor, but we also can forgive ourselves! Forgiveness (Grace) is the way of starting over, the way of being born anew.

So as we lead up to the big day, with family, or friends, or quiet rest alone, I’d say, let’s remember that we are also celebrating the reign of Christ, the kingdom of Jesus whose spirit still lives in our midst. And His Spirit is one of Supreme Love, full of Grace and Truth, full of Grace and Forgiveness. As a nation, we got to forgive ourselves this week for remembering only the story of a happy meal with the Native Americans, when the truth had more to do with oppression towards them. On a personal level, we may need to forgive ourselves and family members for lingering hurts or unmet needs. If the Spirit of Christ is reigning in our hearts, we know we can start over. We

can wipe slates clean, and have a fresh start, a renewal of love and peace.

We can get ready for Thursday by practicing thanksgiving every day. Our Sunday “joys and concerns” are a practice time. Mealtime or the end of the day can be a practice time: What are we thankful for this day? What were some struggles of this day, and are we thankful for help or support we received? I wish my parents had done this with us more often, at the evening meal or at bedtime. I do my best to make it a habit now. *When we practice something regularly, it becomes a habit, and when it becomes a habit, it actually becomes part of who we are!*

We can do it! I know there are plenty of aches and pains... the physical ones many of us have with aging, but also emotional scars and stresses. If we trust that Jesus Reigns, if we trust the Incarnation Spirit that lives in us, we trust that Jesus walks with us... knowing both our physical and psychological troubles! He helps lift us up; he helps us see some light at the end of any tunnel. He helps us to live with hope, that goodness is all around, if we have eyes to see, if we look for it. We trust in the words of Psalm 23, that Surely Goodness and Mercy will follow us all the days of our lives! Amen.