

Sermon – John 18:33-37; Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14  
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Grace Lutheran Church  
Christ the King – Year B  
21 November 2021

### “An Everlasting Dominion”

Sisters and brothers in Christ, grace be unto you and peace in the name God the Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

1. Trials are, by definition, uncomfortable. For everyone involved. Trials result in verdicts that are final, at least until appeal is made to a higher court. Guilty or innocent? So much hangs in the balance. I suppose that’s why the word trial, which narrowly refers to legal proceedings, has a far broader colloquial meaning. Trials and tribulations and all that. Trials are tests of patience and stamina, examinations of the faith of all participants, not just of the person in the dock. In our broken world, trials are – at their best – attempts by faithful servants of the law to establish truth and justice. At their worst, trials invert that for which they ostensibly stand, with puffery, posturing, and political undertones overwhelming any actual search for truth. And in the hands of empire, trials are nothing more than kangaroo courts handing down outcomes and verdicts long preordained, reinforcing systems of oppression and injustice.
2. On this final Sunday of the church year, we are in the courtroom. Today is Christ the King Sunday, although the moment seems anything but regal. Jesus, abandoned by his friends in the dark hours of the night, finds himself before Pontius Pilate. Jesus, the defendant, is forced to take the stand. He is not, however, that interested in defending himself. The charges against him carry capital burdens, but Jesus seems oddly unconcerned. Unlike a guilty man doing whatever he can to find acquittal, Jesus leans into what he knows

is coming. Jesus, of course, is not guilty of the charges before him. He is not seeking to overthrow Rome's earthly power or start a revolution. On the other hand, he's guilty and he knows it. He *has* come to overthrow Rome; he *has* come to undo the power of the oppressive religious elites; he has come to topple regimes of injustice and violence. He *has* come to start the revolution. But he has not come to do so with power; at least not with the sort of power that this world so often wields.

3. Make no mistake; this world wields power. Our reading today from Daniel only tells half the story. Perhaps the arrangers of the lectionary, the series of readings, thought us too squeamish to hear Daniel's full, apocalyptic vision. Daniel's dream, which you can read in chapter seven, paints a picture that is fantastical on the surface but all too real underneath. His vision is of four beasts, emerging from chaos, that seek dominion through violence. One after the other, a lion, a bear, a leopard, and a ten-horned monster arise, dominating humanity and subjugating creation. Who can stand to face them? Will their reign last forever? It's tempting to see Daniel's vision as a code to crack or as a picture of what will literally unfold in the future, but things are not that complicated. The simple fact of the matter is that these are the beasts the seek to reign over us in world, the forces around us and the monsters inside us. Evil, we are reminded by Daniel, is real. It is all around us. It is inside us. Unchecked, sin rules in our hearts and our minds, perverting the truth and seeking to enthrone us in the place of power that belongs to God alone. But this way leads always to death.
4. So, into the kingdom of death Jesus goes. In his trial before Pilate, Jesus slowly turns the tables. Pilate, representative of the greatest power on earth, expects Jesus to respond as victims of his regime always do, reacting to power with power until they realize they are powerless before Caesar. But Jesus claims no such power. He has not come to take Caesar's place as a new worldly emperor. Jesus has another end in mind. He stands before Pilate,

willingly submitting to the power of the empire while also asserting that that power – this world’s power – is nothing compared to the radical nature of God’s power. A power built not upon fear or violence or oppression, but upon a love that gives itself away for the sake of others.

5. Both Daniel and John the Revelator pull back the curtain today to show us a vision of God’s future, and in God’s future the powers of this world are always in the past. Yes, sin and death and all their forces lay claim to the thrones, but they cannot – they will not – hold power forever. Today, we see the vision that is unfolding, that is already assured through the death and resurrection of Christ. Today we hear that Jesus is King. And if Jesus is King, then all other would-be rulers are not. Try as they might, they cannot hold power forever. Today we hear, and today we proclaim, that Christ is King. And this means that Pharaoh is not, and Caesar is not. Neither is Trump, and neither is Biden, for that matter. Only Christ shall rule. But he doesn’t only displace the broken governments of our world. Christ will rule all in all. If Jesus is King – and Jesus *is* King – then all other powers will be dethroned. Their reigns will come to an end. Oppression and injustice, racism and white supremacy, poverty and hunger and war. These shall be kings no more; their power shall come to an end. And the good news continues: If Jesus is King, then all the beasts that afflict us are kings no longer. Cancer isn’t king. Dementia isn’t king. Depression isn’t king. Addiction isn’t king. Estrangement and alienation and all forms of brokenness shall be cast down from the dais, exposed as the pretenders that they are. Christ is King, and Christ alone. He is the One who went down into death to restore us to life. He, in his refusal to claim earthly power – the power that always seeks dominion over others – has shown forth the power of another world, of God’s reality. Jesus has established the power of truth. And the truth is that love, the love of God that always gives itself away for the sake of others, is the power that will outlast all others. By his blood has he freed us from our sins, and all other powers wail before him. In Christ, the dominion of God has begun, and it is unlike any

other. For Christ does not seek to dominate but to free; not to bind but to loose; not to grind down, but to lift up.

6. In the Kingdom of God, we are free from all that would rule and oppress us. We are free, most importantly, even from ourselves and our desire to lord over others. We are called, therefore, to be citizens of the new world that God is creating. Frank Thomas – the preacher, not the White Sox Hall of Famer – writes in *The Christian Century*, “Ultimately, the reign of God is God’s government set up in the human heart. God comes into the human heart at the point of regeneration and makes that heart a holy habitation. ... When God occupies a human heart, then the kingdom has come to earth. When God sets up government in a human heart, then peace shall reign. When God sets up government in a human heart, then we shall beat our swords into plowshares. When God sets up government in enough human hearts, then we shall study war no more.” Amen and amen. As Luther reminds us in the catechism, “God’s kingdom comes on its own without our prayer,” but we pray in the Lord’s Prayer “that it may also come to us.”
  
7. So, friends, whatever trials you are enduring shall come to an end. The powers of this world, rage as they might, will not reign forever. Whatever injustice occurs, whatever oppression endures, shall not rule forever. These trials and tribulations shall end. Sin and suffering have an expiration date. But Christ shall reign forever. Today, seek justice and love mercy, for God has had mercy on you. While the world seeks power and speaks hate, listen to the voice of the Shepherd King, speaking always truth and love. His Kingdom is not from this world, but it is the only Kingdom that will last. Thanks be to God, by the grace of God, we are citizens of this Kingdom forever. Amen.

And now may that peace that passes all understanding keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus, this day and forever. Amen.