

Thank you to everyone for their involvement in last Sunday's Service of Installation and Reception for Mary Katherine – it truly was a great day in the neighborhood. If you missed being here, only watched on TV or otherwise heard about everyone receiving and wearing their red stole – there are still some stoles left and we would love to offer one to you today!

Thank you also to all who shared in extending our love and care as a church to Martha Anne McFadden and her family following the death of Bob.

Some of the feedback from last week's Installation Service was appreciation for the reminder about the meaning and the colors of the various seasons of the Christian year – Purple, White, Green and Red. Today is one of the odd Sundays in the Christian Year – known originally as Christ the King Sunday or better now as Reign of Christ this is the final Sunday in the Christian year prior to the First Sunday of Advent – it is a Sunday in ordinary Time yet its proper liturgical color is white.

The focus of Reign of Christ Sunday is the meaning of and the implications of our affirmation that Jesus is Lord – that Jesus reigns - both in church and all creation. Such a focus is an apt conclusion to the liturgical year summing up as it does so much about whom we believe and trust Jesus Christ to be. To celebrate the Reign of Christ in many ways ties together much of what we have heard and seen and shared throughout the past year and prepares us to step once again into the Season of Hope and Expectation, the Season of Advent, a time of wrestling with the meaning and the promise of the coming of Jesus Christ, the Lord, not only as the Child in the manger but as the Lord of All in the Second Advent, yet to break in upon the world.

This sermon, "An Audience of One!" is intended for this Reign of Christ Sunday as an opportunity and invitation, a plea, asking us to stop and consider in the fullest way possible every implication that the Reign of Christ has for us, for the church, for the world and for the church's mission in the world.

To say Jesus is Lord, to live seeking to acknowledge the Reign of Christ
.... is not our natural state and inclination as humans – our natural state is to place ourselves at the center of the universe and act accordingly.

.... has enormous, all-embracing, eternal, implications for who we are as people, for how we live our lives, for everything that we are and hope to be as a church.

....asks us to get down and dirty, to engage with the very heart and center of what it is to be Christian people, for the Christ who reigns is the same Christ who knelt to wash the feet of the disciples and who endured the shame and humiliation of the cross.

For all these reasons this theme, this special Sunday, this sermon, and our response to this sermon is much needed. Today is a day for getting back to basics, a day for accepting and embracing all the possibilities that God has for us, today is a day for a clarified focus and a renewed passion for our God and our faith. Today is a day to place our lives, our hearts and minds, our attitudes and actions, our very being before the one whom we call Lord of All.

The reign of Christ and our response to the affirmation that Jesus is Lord is what enables us to see God, our lives and the connection between God and our lives as they really are. A story about coming to see things as they really are.....

In most of the United States there is a policy of checking on any stalled vehicle on the highway when temperatures drop to single digits or below. About 3 a.m. one very cold morning, a Montana State Trooper responded to a call that there was a car off the shoulder of the road outside Great Falls, Montana. He located the car, stuck in deep snow and with the engine still running. Pulling in behind the car with his emergency lights on, the trooper walked to the driver's door to find an older man seemingly asleep behind the wheel and a few beer cans on the passenger seat.

The driver came awake when the trooper tapped on the window. Seeing the rotating lights in his rearview mirror, and the state trooper standing next to his car, the man panicked. He jerked the gearshift into drive and hit the gas.

The car's speedometer was showing 20-30-40 and then 50 MPH, but it was still stuck in the snow, wheels spinning. This particular Trooper had a sense of humor, so he began running in place next to the speeding (but stationary) car. The driver was totally freaked, think the trooper was actually keeping up with him.

This went on for about 30 seconds, till the trooper yelled. "PULL OVER!" The man nodded, turned his wheel and stopped the engine. Needless to say, the man from North Dakota was arrested and is likely still shaking his head over the state trooper in Montana who could run 50 miles per hour.

There is no shortage of things, stuff, attitudes, actions, thoughts that interfere with our ability to see things as they really in our life and faith, if we are to truly express our affirmation that Christ reigns, that Jesus is Lord.

Both our Scripture readings today describe the meaning of the Lordship of Jesus Christ. In the Gospel reading we see the disciples gather at the mountain, the place at which Jesus had instructed them to gather. We hear Jesus declare to the disciples that to Him has been entrusted all authority in heaven and on earth and as an expression of this authority Jesus is sending the disciples throughout the entire world so they can share the message and meaning of Jesus with and to and for everyone.

The passage in Colossians 1 offers a more structured theological amplification of what the Lordship of Jesus Christ means for any who desire to follow Jesus Christ. I want us to hear what this passage says and to help us I want to use some excerpts from the Cotton Patch version of this letter. The Cotton patch version of the New Testament is a paraphrase written by Clarence Jordan. Jordan was both a Biblical scholar and a prophetic man of action. He lived out his New Testament faith in the soil of rural Georgia in the 1950's and 1960's during the struggle for Civil Rights. Jordan founded an inter-racial community called Koinonia where folks worked side-by-side to make a living, following Jesus - a radical concept in that day and place. This community experienced a great deal of opposition, even from those who followed or claimed they followed the same Lord.

Colossians tells us that Jesus is Lord, Christ reigns, because Jesus alone can rescue us from the powers of evil and death, and bring those who trust Him into the kingdom of love and peace, where there is

forgiveness of sins. As the Cotton Patch version of this letter puts it: Jesus is Lord, Christ reigns, because the Father sprang us from the jailhouse of darkness, and turned us loose in the new world of his beloved Son, through whom we get our pardon, the forgiveness of our crimes.

Colossians tells us that Jesus is Lord, Christ reigns because Jesus is the visible image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; in whom all things in heaven and on earth were created. The Cotton Patch version puts it this way: "Jesus is a perfect photo of the Unseen God."

Some of us will from time to time be somewhere or meet someone and they will ask us – are you the son or daughter of John or Jack or Jean or Jenny? Or they will say you must be John's son or Jenny's daughter – you look just like them. When it comes to God this concept is turned around – it is Jesus, the Son, who gives us the visible likeness of the invisible Father. As we look at Jesus, as we see Jesus we get to see who God is and what God is like – Jesus is the perfect photo of the Unseen God. Let us never then get stuck in imagining that God is only the seemingly narrow-minded, judgmental, unapproachable, vindictive deity that is often inferred from some sections of especially the Old Testament. The way, the best way, indeed the only way to know who God is and what God is like is to look at the Son, at Jesus, the visible likeness of the invisible God, the perfect photo of the unseen God.

Colossians tells us that Jesus is Lord, Christ reigns, because Jesus, sharing the nature of God, existed before creation began and indeed holds the entire creation in being. As the Cotton Patch version puts it: Jesus has got it over everything that ever was made, because he's the reason everything was put together.

Colossians tells us that Jesus is Lord, Christ reigns because He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. As the Cotton Patch version puts it: Jesus is the boss of the body, his church. He is the source, the originator of the resurrection. The result is that he's tops any way you look at it.

Colossians tells us that Jesus is Lord, Christ reigns because in Jesus all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through Jesus, God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross. Cotton Patch: In Jesus God put all his eggs in one basket and showed, through him, that he was friendly towards everybody. Indeed, by the blood shed at his lynching he brought about peace with all, both on the earth and in heaven.

These are powerful words – in Jesus, God put all his eggs in one basket. This Jesus is God and in Jesus God is friendly towards everybody without any limits or distinctions, and God is willing to be lynched, unjustly, to bring about peace.

The fact that we are here in church today is a sign that we have been, are and want to wrestle with the Lordship of Jesus, the Reign of Christ. We know that God is in charge, we believe that God knows best, we want to trust that God has a claim upon our lives... and yet we so often reduce our following to what we prefer, we so often downplay the radical call to lose our lives, to give away our lives for the sake of our Lord. We somehow imagine that we can get away with the lowest and the least, reluctant to hear that God asks us for our all we think we can somehow trick God with a little bit of faith, with only some of our thoughts, with just a little – just a wee bit - of who we are and what we own. But you would agree this is not the full response called for by Jesus our Lord.

I offer you this brief anecdote that sums up how it is we try to pull the wool over God's eyes, even though we know that God sees all and God needs our all... There were these two truckers, Wilbur and Jasper were driving along the back roads of a small town. Jasper was behind the wheel. All of a sudden, they came to an overpass with a sign that read "CLEARANCE 11 feet 3 inches." They got out and measured their rig, which was 11 feet, 5 inches tall. "What do you think?" Wilbur asked Jasper. Jasper looked around carefully, motioned for them to climb back into the cab, shifted into first gear and with a broad smile said, "Not a cop in sight. Let's DO IT!"

My friends, there isn't a cop in sight but Jesus the Lord is an audience of One who sees all we are, all we do, all we claim to be. It is to this Jesus, Jesus the Lord; to this Christ, the Christ who reigns, that we are invited to dedicate and devote our lives. For your life, for my life, for our lives, Jesus our Lord is an audience of one! Amen.