

# “The One Handed Over”

II Samuel 23:1-7; Revelation 1:4b-8; John 18:33-37

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From the Pulpit

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A sermon delivered by The Rev. Dr. Timothy C. Ahrens, Sr. Minister, The First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, The Reign of Christ Sunday, November 22, 2015, dedicated to all the victims of terror in Paris, Beirut, for all those killed on the Russian airliner murdered in airspace and all who are acted upon in terrible and terroristic ways, to Betsy Zahn our 2015 Lay Leadership Award Winner and always to the glory of God!

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Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of each one of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our salvation. Amen.

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Throughout our lives we are told we can make a difference in this world by the *Actions* we take, by the things we do. What we are not told (even in the church where we live and breathe the story of Jesus) is that God can make something of our *Passion*, that is, **what is done to us**. The word Passion comes from the Latin *pascho*

which means *“to be done to.”* It is the opposite of *poio* which means *“to do.”*

In this life there is action and there is passion.

In II Samuel 23:1-7 King David has come to the end of his reign. He is down to his last words on earth. His days of action are all behind him. This is passion – now he is being acted upon as he arrives at Death’s door.

Here is what King David says about reigning over people. Whoever governs well and justly rules in the fear of God. He compares it to the first light of day without a cloud in the sky, like green grass carpeting the earth and glistening under fresh rain. He prays that his leadership has been faithful to this beauty and this cycle of life. But he notes the forces of this world that have no fear of God and declares them to be **the devil’s** henchmen. They are like thorns raked together, piled as trash and burned in a bonfire before they can destroy those around them.

With this, King David’s Reign comes to an end. David’s last words stand forever. The King is dead. His final words prevail upon all who follow – live into the beauty of this world; fear God, love God and do not allow

the devil's henchmen, the forces of hate and destruction prevail over what is beautiful and just and good.

We meet another King in our text from John. We meet Jesus in the midst of his Passion. We meet him as **“the one handed over.”** In his book *The Stature of Waiting*, W. H. Vanstone digs deep into **“the handing over”** of Jesus. He writes that The New Testament word is *paradidomi* - **“to hand over”** is used 32 times to describe what Judas Iscariot did to Jesus. And every time we have mistranslated the word as **“betrayed.”**

Why have we done this? While the Gospel writers clearly call it what is Jesus as **“the one handed over”** translators have given us the more familiar word, **“betrayed.”** Being handed over has overtones (and undertones) of **God's redemptive work in this world** through Jesus Christ. While betrayal by Judas puts all the **power in Judas' hands.** Using the word correctly, we see that Jesus has the power. To be handed over is an act of submission and trust. Judas hands Jesus over to the authorities. The authorities hand Jesus over to Pilate and **here before Pilate we encounter the “handed over one”** in our text today. And we encounter the expression twice in this text as Jesus is called the One Handed Over.

Pilate is frightened and fascinated with the one He calls “the King of the Jews.” He tries to get the bottom of this King-stuff. Jesus simply says, *“I have come into the world to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.”* The essence of Jesus’ Kingly presence boils down to two truths. Jesus has come into the world to testify to the truth and inspire all of us to listen to the truth. How are we doing with this? How are we listening to the truth of the one handed over? How are we living into his Passion and our Passion on the edge of Advent Promise? In Advent we will be encountered by the Son of David (read Jesus of Nazareth) coming into this world once again to turn everything upside down. He is coming to usher in the eternal kingdom of truth, justice and God’s light!

That’s next week.... I am getting ahead of myself. Or am I? How does the Passion of Christ tie into his incarnate word arriving in this world as a baby? I think they are completely connected – birth and passion.

Newborn babies and tiny infants are the true “Handed Over” Presence of God in this world. If you have a baby born into a big family – chances are that child’s feet

might not hit the ground for at least a year as he is handed over person to person in the circle of love. I saw this the other night at dinner with my son, my daughter-in-law and Susan. My grandson Benton went from hands to hands throughout the dinner. It was a three course dinner – appetizers, main dish and Benton. Quite a meal!

As a child born in the City of King David, Jesus was also one born into a family of love - a child handed over to loved ones all his life. And then, as we meet in his passion, **he is the one handing himself over...**

It is here in the **Passion the “One Handed Over”** teaches us what a king really looks like. At the core of our most challenging life experiences – as we face trying times, struggles in the battles of life, a serious accident, struggles in marriage or in interpersonal and family relationships, perhaps a disabling disease in ourselves or loved ones near to us, or perhaps loss in health or loss in unspoken and untold ways in our life for which we cannot find words - all we have is going through the Passion – that which is done to us.

Illness strikes you and you find yourself a patient in a hospital. Being a patient is humiliating. You are powerless.

You are handed over to the care of others - all day and all night long. **You are in someone else's hands.**

But other circumstances can be thrust upon you too – unemployment, retirement, poverty, divorce, loss of mobility and strength, mental illness, depression, drug or alcohol addiction, blindness, dementia. All these things and more can strike us down. Stuck in a wheelchair you experience humiliation not unlike the cross. You may wonder what God is doing to you as you become more like the One Handed Over than like the full and dignified person you were - not long before. Once you felt more like a king or a queen. Now, you struggle to understand why and how you will move again.

In this world where we are taught that dignity comes from acting, doing and being the subject of action, to suddenly (or gradually) become the receiver, the passion **object of someone else's action, we feel indignity and** perhaps even humiliation.

Standing before Pilate, Jesus – The One Handed Over – had everything to lose and nothing to gain. His **“doing”** days were done. There would be no more raising the dead,

healing the sick, teaching, preaching or changing the world. He was being acted upon.

This story which we lift up on the Reign of Christ Sunday doesn't leave feeling all warm inside. Our music sings of power but the passage speaks of passion. Here we encounter what redemption really looks like. Here we meet a God who is willing to be handed over for us. No longer the one raising people out of pain, he is willing to go into the pain. No longer the Lord of Life who is raising the dead, he is walking deep into the valley of the shadow of death. No longer the one who touches the possessed and makes their madness go away, he is willing to step into the madness and feel the confusion, struggle, anxiety and pain of carrying the cross of confusion and disruption. No longer walking the way of a purpose driven life, he gets into our wheelchair, stands behind our walkers, limps in our brokenness and feels our aches and pains, our humiliations and sadness, our dementia and blindness, our unemployment, our struggles in marriage and in relationships, our losses which are small and huge. He is right there with us. He truly is "Immanuel" – "God with Us!" He really is God with Skin on!

I was reminded of how Christ - in his passion - enters into our lives right where we are. It happened a few weeks ago when Lola Davis Edwards handed me a Stewardship Witness her daughter Sarah Davis Early offered on November 4, 1984. On that November day 31 years ago, Sarah stood in this sanctuary and told the church how (then Senior Minister) Dr. Chalmers Coe had been by her side when her son Benjamin was in a near fatal accident. Dr. Coe sat and prayed with Sarah and her husband Richard. It was a simple direct prayer for life and health and comfort that only a benevolent God can give at such times.

Sarah continued: *“Through this simple act I realized what the church was. I saw our church as a reflection of the passion of Christ in our world. For I saw that it was the passion of Christ that enabled Dr. Coe to pray with and console two grieving parents. It’s also the passion of Christ that enables teachers to come weekly and teach Sunday School. It is the passion of Christ that gives meaning to the music and words spoken here. It is the passion of Christ that sees and fights injustices in our homes, neighborhoods, our cities, states and world. It is the passion of Christ that literally gives meaning to our daily lives.... (She continues) We are part of the tribe of Israel, a chosen people; a living part of the*

*crucifixion and resurrection of Christ in (our times). We are heirs to God's work on earth and this inheritance should not be forgotten. I support our church because I want the passion of our Lord to be heard in a world crying for help, to be seen by the victims of its injustice and to be felt by the grieving and the lonely. God has given us an unconditional love that the world tries to understand. We can be torchbearers of this love by our prayers, our financial support and our involvement in this church."*

In Sarah's poignant words, we encounter the passion of Christ. We see and hear what it means to live fully into life lived for "The One Who Was Handed Over."

The story of Christ's Passion on this Reign of Christ Sunday is crucial for us. Our lives are not only action but a constant mixture of action and passion – of what we do and what is done to us.

We are called to engage this world. We are called – in King David's words – to take on the devil's henchmen who seek to destroy what is beautiful and good and fair and just in this world. We are called to stand up to ISIS and those closer at hand whose sole purpose is to destroy life. We do

this through our teaching, healing, loving and making justice and peace in our world.

But, we are also called to let God redeem us and heal us through the passion which enters our lives every day – knowing our King, our Christ, is with us in the midst of the pain and suffering. The one who went to cross still goes to the cross with us and for us.

Our God is a suffering God in Christ Jesus our Lord. He is all in. He is with us all the way. In our suffering God redeems us in what is done to us – and what is done to God.

The One Handed Over will never abandon us. He will not leave us alone. May we be for him a reflection of his passion in this world. For when we for this, the Reign of Christ will come again. Amen.

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