

The final sermon of the church year delivered by the Rev. Timothy C. Ahrens, senior minister at the First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, the Reign of Christ, November 22, 2009, dedicated to the memory of Bill Willis, Sr., who died two years ago this week, in deep gratitude to the men and women at the Louisville Institutes and always to the glory of God!

“To Reign Over the Earth”

Revelation 1:4b-7; John 18: 33-37

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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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“The one who was and is and is to come . . . ”

“Jesus, the faithful witness . . . ”

“The firstborn from the dead . . . ”

“The ruler of the kings of the earth . . . ”

“The one who loves us and frees us from our sins by his blood . . . ”

“(The one) who made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father . . . ”

“(The one) to whom is given glory and dominion forever and ever.”

“The Alpha and the Omega . . . the beginning and the end”

“...The Almighty.”

“(The one whose) kingdom is not of this world.”

“(The one who) came to testify to the truth.”

AND

“Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to (his) voice.”

With these words defining Jesus Christ in the Book of Revelation and John’s Gospel, our church year cycles to an end.

Our final proclamation is: “*The one who was and is and is to come . . .*” reigns over the earth.

What comes to mind is in our texts of the day is power. Power creates an almost endless array of images: military armaments, political might, people organizing for social change, personal charisma, physical force, social influence, money, thermonuclear energy and freakish acts of nature.

For those outside the circles and influences of power, moving inside seems like the key to success and happiness. For the powerless, gaining power seems more and more of a distant hope.

And even in gaining power, those who reach this place must learn the limits of power. Politicians find that lobbyists, men and women with money and influence and people organizing with different ideas and agendas can often thwart their plans. Parents find their control over their children is not what they had anticipated. Even the power to bring about good is often subject to corruption and loss of purpose and direction. The phrase “Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely” comes to mind. (The two previous paragraphs are drawn from *Texts for Preaching, Year B*, pp. 596-597).

Power. We find in the titles ascribed to Jesus and to God a reinforcement of the nature of God’s power. While the kings of Israel and even the Emperor of Rome are kings on earth, Jesus is declared the “ruler of the kings of earth.” (Revelation 1:5) While those who put Jesus to death act powerfully, they quickly find that their power has been utterly overturned. (Rev. 1:7) Only the one who stands at the beginning and the end holds real power. (Rev. 1:8)

Yet, we ask as we read John 18, the second of John’s seven scenes of Jesus’ trial, persecution and crucifixion, why is this passage found here, oddly out of place on the last Sunday of the church year. With echoes of *O Come, O Come Emmanuel* already

ringing our ears, Black Friday nipping at our consumer heels and Advent fast approaching with images of the babe in swaddling cloth locked into our minds, how did we get to Jesus' trial before Pilate just moments before Mary finds out she is pregnant?

The truth is that we are proclaiming the reign of Christ today and his power is over Pilate and "this world." It is a power not to be forgotten or taken lightly as we approach the manger once again.

"To reign over the earth" is in itself a powerful image. What does the reign of Christ over the earth look like and feel like? Throughout the New Testament, Jesus reigning *over the earth* means he is at one with the earth and all her inhabitants. His power gives him authority to forgive ALL sins. (Mark 2:10) His power gives Jesus authority to grant justice when he finds faith on earth. (Luke 18:8) When he reigns over the earth, all will find strength to stand before him. (Luke 21: 35-36) And he will draw all people unto to himself when he is lifted up. (John 12:32-34)

What is utterly amazing throughout scripture is that for Jesus to reign over the earth means he is at one with the earth. His power is shared with all creation. His power unifies humanity and the earth when justice and peace embrace. For Jesus, his mission is to renew all things for all time. His purpose is to point us to one God, who will reign over the universe. Our purpose must be to embrace justice and peace for the earth and for all humanity. Wherever the earth and all its inhabitants are sick unto death, we must be part of the healing of creation. It is what we are called to do and be under the reign of Christ.

Writing in the mid-19th century, Frederick William Faber wrote, "Earth grows into heaven, as we come to live and breathe in the atmosphere of the incarnation. Jesus makes heaven wherever he is."

In an article published 100 years later in the *Christian Herald*, entitled, *I Had to Write These Things*, Sholem Asch wrote of Jesus:

“Jesus Christ is the outstanding personality of all time. . . . No other teacher - Jewish, Christian, Buddhist, Mohammedan - is **still** a teacher whose teaching is such a guidepost for the world we live in. Other teachers may have basis for (people across the world), but every act and word of Jesus has value for all of us. He became the Light of the World. Why shouldn't I, a Jew, be proud of that?”

Last Wednesday, one of the most beautiful and blessed of God's creation came to church for the first time. His name is Aarav Peter. He is 6 weeks old and his proud parents, Malani and Pavan, carried him from person to person and room to room to show us their shining beam of light, their firstborn son. As the four of us stood in the chancel and held onto each other, I lifted a prayer to the one who reigns over the earth. I asked a blessing for Aarav and his parents and as I did, mid-afternoon sunlight was showered upon us from the Alpha and Omega window to our southwest. The heavenly light came down and touched Aarav as the incense of our prayers was lifting to heaven.

In this awesome and peaceful moment, I became more fully aware of the power of what it means to worship, praise and follow “the light of the world.” It means that every beam of light cast from heaven to earth, every breath of wind, every finger of God creating, every hair on every child of God is precious and blessed by the one who came to walk among us and forever reign in our hearts and in the universe of God's creating.

It is true that “the one who was and is and is to come” reigns over the earth. He is the light of the world. Why shouldn't we, as Christians, be proud of that? As he reigns over the earth, may he shine his light into our hearts and minds. May we live and breathe in the atmosphere of his incarnation and glory. And may we embrace justice and peace in this, his realm. Amen.