



THE UNITED CHURCH OF CANADA

CANADIAN MEMORIAL CHURCH
& CENTRE FOR PEACE

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Revelation 1:4b-8; John 18:33-37

November 22, 2009

Reign of Christ Sunday

“The One Who Is, Who Was, and Is to Come”

Today is the Reign of Christ Sunday, or more traditionally known as Christ the King Sunday. It always precedes the first Sunday of Advent. The language is a bit anachronistic. We don't have kings ruling over us anymore, but we get the point.

The early Christians made the claim that despite Rome's imperial power, it was actually Christ who was the sovereign force in the cosmos. This was quite a claim, given that they had the boot of Rome firmly planted across their throats. Nevertheless, we read from the book of Revelation that Christ is the “ruler of the kings of the earth” (Revelations 1:5).

Through a mythic or traditional worldview, this is interpreted to mean that one day Christ will actually, physically return to face down the emperor in a mighty battle, and triumph – thus vindicating the followers of Christ and raising them up as victors, not victims of the empire. Conservative Christianity most often

their rule on others throughout history. Christ's reign is about the presence of an all-encompassing and all-indwelling love that is always persuasive, not coercive. So, to say Christ is sovereign is to claim that this love is omnipresent and pan-cosmic – available now and everywhere. To choose to live according to the principles

interprets the book of Revelation this way. It's also why many progressive Christians won't even read this book on Sundays.

But we don't need to take this literally. We don't need to reject the book of Revelation, or shy away from the affirmation that the Christ is sovereign. We do, however, need to do a little reinterpretation from a broader worldview than either traditional or liberal Christianity.

The Reign of Christ as Love

How then is the Christ sovereign? How can we make the claim that Christ reigns? First, the reign of Christ has nothing to do with domination. As the writer of John's gospel observes, through the voice of Jesus, Christ's kingdom is not of this world – it is not enforced or coerced the way strong men and their political regimes have imposed

and practices of love - which includes the reign of justice and ecological sustainability - and to offer our allegiance to love as our highest value is to experience the sovereignty or reign of Christ.

The Reign of Christ as Truth

As well, we make the claim that the Christ is the presence of Truth, which is received and interpreted by each according to their level of consciousness. If the reading from John's gospel was continued this morning, you would have heard Pilate's famous last question to Jesus, before he orders his execution: "What is truth?" We live in a postmodernist age that has given us philosophy called late postmodernism. This philosophy, or worldview, has once again murdered truth. It gave us the insight that all truth is partial, but went over the edge in denying that there are lower and higher truths. On the reign of Christ Sunday, we take Christ as the presence of truth, but recognize that our interpretation of that truth will always be partial. Nevertheless, Christ is the one that leads us into ever-deepening dimensions of truth – the evolution of spiritual truth. To choose to live according to the principles and practices of the ever-evolving truth of the Christ is to experience the reign of Christ.

The Cosmic Reign of Christ

How do we celebrate the reign of Christ with integrity? We need to expand our understanding of Christ to cosmic dimensions. We're not talking about Jesus, the historical man who walked the earth 2000 years ago. Yes, Jesus was a radiant occasion and exemplar of a person who opened himself to the love and the truth of the Christ. But let's remember, both John's gospel and the writings of St. Paul make a distinction between Jesus, the rabbi of Israel, and the Christ. John's gospel begins with the affirmation that Christ, (what John calls Logos or the Word) was in the beginning with God, and that all things came into

being through the Word. This creative principle took up residence in Jesus of Nazareth. That's why we look to Jesus as our primary example or pattern of what the Christ-life looks like. We'll see in a moment that the Christ, this cosmic sacred creative principle, also seeks to take up residence in us and in anybody who is willing to cooperate. It's how the universe gets done!

So, in the reading from Revelation, the writer greets the reader in the name of the One "who is, who was, and who is to come" (1:4b). Now, obviously this can't be an exclusive reference to Jesus, the man. This is a reference to an eternal, omnipresent principle, One who encompasses the past, present, and surprisingly perhaps, the future. And this is where it gets interesting – at least for me.

To see the Christ as *the one who is to come* through a traditional Christian perspective is to imagine that Jesus himself is going to return to earth and clean things up. But from a more universal or integral perspective it might mean something like this: The same creative principle that gave birth to the universe in the past, and that is working in the present through an evolutionary dynamic working in us, also exists also as an archetype of perfect fullness and freedom beckoning us from the unformed future to be all the we can be.

We experience "the One who is to come" in the present as this Absolute Future Potential intersecting with our existing life conditions. It comes to as a promise that by consciously cooperating with the presence of Christ as the evolving Truth and as evolving Love,

God will be in us to accomplish ever-greater things in the service of Christ.

This intersection of our present life conditions and an Absolute Future Potential gets translated in us as a sacred *yearning* for perfection or wholeness of being. This yearning for wholeness includes our own individual lives, but extends beyond us to the whole planet. The yearning has to go beyond our own personal happiness if it's going to activate the soul, because the soul is primarily interested in the well being of the whole. Ironically as we awaken this yearning for the well being of All That Is we discover personal happiness.

This yearning is a very real experience for us. We see an inspiring film or read a novel that moves us, or we go to a concert, and there arises in us a desire to be more just, more noble, more dedicated to our path, more compassionate. It may not linger, but when we recognize it as a call from the "One Who is to come", we tend to pay more attention, and actually make it a spiritual practice by allowing it to deepen and transform us.

To celebrate the sovereignty of Christ is to discover a shift in this yearning, from the desire for more things – the accumulation of more stuff, more degrees, more status, more money – to the realm of *being* itself. We yearn for fullness and freedom of being for all beings. This is a healthy, spiritual yearning that is born of the sacred future, the one who is to come, activating an impulse to evolve spiritually.

The Christification of the Cosmos

This sacred creative principle, who was and is and is to come, the Logos of God, dignifies all of creation by lifting all beings unto and into His or Her own being. The Eastern orthodox tradition calls this the "christification of the cosmos". Christ became human, so that humans could become God. In mythic language, we say that Christ descended into creation so that all of creation might ascend with Christ into the heart of God.

To offer allegiance to Christ is to experience full dignity – the affirmation and blessing of God who loves us, respects us, and desires for us fullness and freedom of being. I often talk about how we are called to recognize and realize what Jesus called the Kin-dom of God. This is what our inner life would be like if Christ reigned; it's what our relationships and our community life would look like if Christ reigned; it's what our social, political, and economic systems would look like if Christ reigned. But the writer of Revelation takes it a step further. He makes the claim that Christ has made us to *be* a kingdom. In other words, we attain such dignity before God that we embody God's realm. Consenting to the reign of Christ means that we actually *become* the Kingdom of God – a living occasion of the reign of God.

Which, if you think about, describes Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. He not only proclaimed the Kingdom of God. He *was* the realm of God in his own flesh and blood, and heart and mind. The community he attracted around him also became the Kingdom of God – that's the church friends. And when we make our way to the table this morning to receive the

bread and the cup, you can think of yourself as being Christified – as evolving, by grace, into your own divine dimensions. As we celebrate the reign of Christ, we become what we celebrate.

This is a profound mystery, and for it, we give thanks.