

Call to Worship

Next Sunday we will begin a new church year. We will begin to prepare for Christmas, and with each succeeding Sunday we will follow Jesus' life from birth to death, celebrate his resurrection at Easter, and the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost. **Jesus is at the center of our life and our church.**

The church's year will end again late next November, just like today, with a day called "Christ the King Sunday." **Jesus rules! Christ reigns! The Lord is God! God is our judge!**

Prayer of Invocation

God, our monarch, you rule our lives, but not from above. You work within us; you come among us; your rule is hidden and mysterious. We see your power, and we are thankful you temper your majesty with love.

You fill us with awe, and we are grateful that you came to earth as an infant, making yourself accessible to us, the ones you rule. We would love you from afar, but you draw close to us seeking to know us. Lord Jesus, the authorities who put you to death called you king, and we hardly know what to do with that title these days. You are our God. We are your people, and we want to know you and worship you. Thank you for being with us. Amen.

The Word

Ephesians 1:15-23 (NRSV)

I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, and for this reason I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers.

I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power.

God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come.

And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

Living the Word

The Hayward United Methodist Church, this church, was begun in 1983. My sons, Donald and Jeff, were some of the first students in the Sunday School; they were also part of the first Confirmation Classes here. Sometime during Jeff's year of Confirmation classes, the phone began to ring almost every night as his friend 'Heidi' wanted to talk.

They were friends and talked for long times, sometimes until we moms had to cut them off. After a while some teasing began and the words 'boyfriend' and 'girlfriend' were mentioned; soon after the phone calls ended... Fast forward to high school: Heidi was now the well liked manager for the football team, Jeff one of the popular players and had a different, serious girlfriend, who was in his life all through high school.

Fall, Senior year, Homecoming – Jeff came home one night devastated. He had been crowned the 'Homecoming King,' and if that wasn't bad enough, Heidi was crowned the 'Homecoming Queen.' I felt all of

the honor and pride that he wasn't feeling, and tried to help him appreciate the honor that his classmates had bestowed on him.

He wasn't having any of it. Now he would have to ride in the convertible in the Homecoming parade instead of on the fire truck with the rest of the football players. Now he would have to dance with Heidi at the Homecoming dance, and what would his girlfriend think of that? But the worst part of all was...and he presented to me as he said it, "I have to wear this!" The crown: the same crown that you now see before you on the Worship Table.

The afternoon before the big game, I did my motherly duty and stood on the corner where the parade route would turn from the school and head all the way down main street Hayward. I had my camera ready and have a number of pictures of the Homecoming King and Queen in their crowns. Heidi smiling and Jeff is looking back yearningly to the fire truck coming right behind them.

He did survive the whole ordeal, but for sure he was a reluctant king. Ultimately, how you wear a crown is your choice. Others may have worn it differently.

The followers of Jesus wanted him to wear a royal crown, one that would lead to the destruction of Rome, one that would free them from the captivity that they lived in. Jesus continued to speak of another 'kingdom, way beyond the blue...He knew that the crown he would wear here on earth wasn't red velvet and silver, but one made of thorns.

Marcus Borg shares the insight that many Hebrew people flooded Jerusalem for the celebration of Passover, so on the day of Jesus modest entry into the city on a donkey, the Roman Soldiers were riding into the city from the opposite direction, to keep order; they were riding great steeds in full armor. Picture that contrast.

Jesus made a choice how he would wear that crown, and he also looked back, but in that case - to see if the disciples would follow him in this crown, a crown of thorns. By making the choice that he did, verse 20-23, tells us this: ²⁰*God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places,* ²¹*far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come.* ²²*And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church,* ²³*which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.*

Jesus' followers were looking for a royal earthly king, but Jesus wore an earthy crown which was filled with God's power and dominion over all and in all people and the church. The fancy crown was waiting for him on the seat at God's right hand, after he completed his time here on earth. We have been given a place there also, the book of Revelation evens mentions a promise of a crown for us.

Paul wants us to know God's power through Christ which is today revealed in Christ's body, the church. The power that is in us comes by way of the Holy Spirit. How did Jesus dominate with God's power? Christ's absolute time in power is a qualification for the completion of God's kingdom, for the love, peace and justice that finally and totally wins over the forces of death and destruction find their power and authority in the person and work of Christ.

Jesus gave of himself for others. We have been offered Jesus the King with all dominion, to live and work in us. But it takes a conscious choice to accept this offer, personally and as a church working together. The dominion of Christ over the world is focused on and exists for the benefit of the church – the body of Christ.

Jesus is exalted, and the church is raised up with him, and granted the honor of participating in God's transformation of the world. All of this by the way he humbled himself with crown and cross.

How do we 'dominate' what has been put in our care by God? How do we take rule of the things we have been put in charge of? Humbly like Christ or with our own rule and authority? Can we give of ourselves for others? How do we handle our options of dominion, by following Christ or by following our own desires.

It has to happen in the making of a conscious choice: I do this because of Christ in me. Christ, the King in us, is kind, and just and loving. We have that all in us, but we have to refer to it when we choose how to react to each other. We can be kind and just and loving like Jesus. Paul says in verse 17: *¹⁷I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him,*

Paul understands that all that we do, the choices we make, affect the outcome. Paul also understands, that God sent Jesus to give us a way to be forgiven of our wrong choices when we recognize them and turn back to Christ. All of this involves processing the choices that we make. Paul prays for the Ephesians and for God to give us a spirit of wisdom and revelation, as we come to know God better. But it is ultimately up to us to take the chance to get to know God better and then to accept what we have learned from the wisdom and revelations that we may acquire.

Every choice has God involved in it. In most choices we don't even consciously process the implications of our Creator, God within them. Think what a different place this would be if every decision was made by the Christ within us?

For example, and I include myself in this...what if we asked Jesus to guard the things that come out of our mouths and made a conscious effort to be Christ-like in all that we say? On occasion, I know that I have been known to speak too quickly without much processing and without the Christ within me. I have seen the hurt and harm that can come from that as well.

When you can acknowledge with a statement like "I am doing this because of Christ the King within me," then you can call yourself a Christ follower, a Christian. Recognizing that Christ is King, is only a first step, you then have to follow him, then like Paul, people will know of your faith in the Lord Jesus. Wouldn't any one of us like to get a letter from someone saying "¹⁵*I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, and for this reason¹⁶I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers.*"

It would have been easy and still could be, to judge Jeff's attitude toward the crown, how he responded to the honor of being the class representative for Homecoming that year. But it isn't up to us to judge anyone else, but to be even better examples of the Christ within us.

Maybe it is because I was beginning to understand some about teenage traumas, or because as his mother I love him unconditionally, but it was easy to forgive him and after all he gave me the crown, which I have used as a prop many times to share about Christ the King. It can also be a reminder of the crown we wear: sometimes it feels like a crown of thorns, making our lives difficult and even unbearable; sometimes it feels like a crown of velvet and silver, when our lives are good and our cup runneth over. Wherever we are at, it is about our attitude toward the circumstances in which we find ourselves.

When asked the question: Is the cup half empty or half full, an optimist, focusing on what he or she has, and observes what is in the glass - the full half. A pessimist, on the other hand, focuses on what is missing, what he or she doesn't have - the empty half. But would an optimistic person answer half full while indeed they are trying to empty the content of the glass? On the other hand, would a pessimistic person answer half empty while they intend to fill the glass? So then does it depend on how you look at it if your filling the cup up then its half full and if your drinking its half empty.

An answer in the Engineering school was, that the glass is just twice as big as it needs to be. If you look at it as just a glass with water in it, then that's what it is. If you put meaning into it then the glass will always be completely full. How full do you want your glass?

Recognizing the Christ in you may look different in different times, but beware of either crown. It isn't about what the crown feels like, but how you wear it. Thorns can be worn with the knowledge that ultimately God wins; Jesus bought the victory for us and we can get through the worst by the Christ within us. Don't revel in the thorns as a martyr might and don't ever lose hope.

In Ephesians, Paul prays that the reader may know "the hope to which God has called them." The substance of this hope is related to Christ's sovereignty through the repeated phrase "all things." God has put all things beneath Christ, and Christian hope is embedded in this amazing assurance.

Likewise, don't get so comfortable in the velvet crown as to become proud and self sufficient. Christ wore both crowns with purpose and wisdom, so can you. Paul writes in verses 18 & 19: ¹⁸ "so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints,¹⁹ and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power."