

Jeremiah 23: 1-6
St. Luke 1: 68-79
Colossians 1: 11-20
St. Luke 23: 33-43

Sunday Next Before Advent 2022
Reign of Christ the King 2022

“[Jesus Christ] is the head of the Body, the Church.” Colossians 1: 18a

In July 1984, an American named Terry Wallace was a passenger in a car that was in a severe accident, killing the driver. Terry was not found by rescuers until the next day, in a comatose condition. For about 19 years, Terry Wallace remained in a vegetative state – he was fed and cared for, but there was no evidence that Terry would ever recognize his family, or talk again...

For some miraculous reason, all this changed in July 2003 – *19 years* after Terry was in the car accident. He began responding when his family was nearby. Terry called out “Mom.” Then he asked for a drink of Pepsi, and after that, milk. Terry was a paraplegic. However, within a very short time, Terry was completely verbal and engaged with the world around him. His mother, Angilee Wallis, called her son's return to consciousness "a miracle..."

One of the adjustments Terry had to make is that the world had changed in the 19 years that Terry was comatose! His state governor, Bill Clinton of Arkansas, had gone on to be president of the United States; and following that, George W. Bush was now president.

In summary, there was the reality of the world around Terry Wallace, but he was completely *unaware* of this reality, for a period of about 19 years...

In the rhythm of the Church year, today is the last Sunday of the current Church year. Next Sunday, we will begin the Season of Advent, our countdown of Hope as Christmas approaches. In our lectionary, today is commonly called The Feast of Christ the King; or similarly, The Reign of Christ... We're invited to consider what it means to say (and to live out) that Jesus Christ *reigns*, in every corner of our lives...

I suggest there are 2 broad responses which people can make: One response is to be somewhat like Terry Wallace before he woke up – there is the reality of God's presence and grace penetrating our world, but we are not observing this reality... Or, we can have “eyes to see” the glory of God, and we recognize the gracious presence of the Holy Spirit around us and within us...

It's worthwhile to consider what God's kingdom is like. Jesus Christ's first sermons were about the coming kingdom of God – inaugurated through Jesus Christ himself. Mark 1: 14-15 reads,

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.'

The kingdom of God, introduced by the Lord Jesus, is marked by humility, justice, care for others and love of God. Let's recall that Jesus himself did and showed a lot about the kingdom of God as he was hanging on the cross, dying for all of humanity. Luke records it this way:

The soldiers also mocked [Jesus], coming up and offering him sour wine, and saying, 'If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!' There was also an inscription over him, 'This is the King of the Jews.'

One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, 'Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!' But the other rebuked him, saying, 'Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong.' Then he said, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.' He replied, 'Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.'

In the midst of his torture and humiliation, Jesus is ministering to the repentant criminal hanging next to him. So, the kingdom which Jesus Christ has brought about isn't about status, power, or reward. It is marked by radical self-sacrifice, and care for the disadvantaged. Jesus Christ began his Sermon on the Mount with these words:

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God [and so on].

We really need to hold before us this new way of living, with God's priorities, because the pressures of this world push us in exactly the opposite direction. We tend to associate kings and queens with status and power and wealth! The Church on earth has sometimes taken on these qualities for herself: Historically, Christian leaders have too often valued power, wealth and status for themselves, and have failed dismally to uphold the kind of kingdom that God himself – *God himself!* – expects in the lives of his disciples...

So, we are called especially today to a kind of wakefulness: To recognize the presence and power of the true King of kings in our lives, and to live in response to this fact.

The values of the kingdom which you and I are expected to adopt are not about status, fame, wealth or power. True freedom, the New Testament reveals, is by joyful surrender as we are adopted into Christ's family, the worldwide Church. Belonging to this kingdom means looking toward one another very differently than what the world models, and to have a very different view of *God*, the universe's supremely self-offering, generous, eternal Spirit. We learn we are to love, in a way which the fallen world around us has never known.

Glory be to the King of kings. Alleluia! Amen.