

Christ the King Sunday, Year B
November 22, 2015
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
Decorah, Iowa
Rev. Amy Larson

Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14
Psalm 93
Revelation 1:4b-8
John 18:33-37

[Click here to read scripture passages for this Sunday](#)

Beloved of God, grace to you and peace from the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end.

Recently my cousin Alicia spent a semester studying abroad in China.

I knew she was in for a life changing experience - I just wasn't expecting her experiences to change me. But then one day she wrote on her blog about how strange it was to live in a country that doesn't have an alphabet.

I knew that the Chinese writing system is based on symbols but I hadn't made the connection that there isn't really an alphabet:

- that you need to know about 3,000 characters just to read a novel;
- that most people with college degrees have learned 6 -7,000 characters;
- and that some dictionaries contain as many as 60,000 characters.
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Which raises the questions - how do you look something up in a dictionary if there is no alphabetical order?

- How is paper work filed?
- How are computer folders organized?
- How do you look up a name in a phone book or a contact list?
- And how do kids know how long to wash their hands if they can't sing an alphabet song while they wash?
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It just blew me away to think about how much of my life is ordered by our alphabet.

With the last name Zalk I hated alphabetical order when I was a kid, but at least I can find my other Zalk relatives' addresses by looking at the bottom of my list of contacts.

Alicia wrote that life without an alphabet involved a radical re-orientation of the way she thought about communication, organization and life.

Encountering cultures other than our own, as we travel or welcome people from other places, gives us the chance to think about the ways we live and order our lives.

That kind of examination and re-orientation can happen for us at Christians when we get glimpses of what the kingdom of God is like, and how much it differs from the ways of our world.

Today, Christ the King Sunday provides a chance to reflect on God's kingdom and on the re-orientation of our lives that God both asks of us and offers to us.

We get the chance to think about what we mean when we say “your kingdom come, on earth as it is in heaven” and the implications of that prayer for our own lives.

We get a glimpse of God’s kingdom in our Gospel story about Jesus as he stands on trial for his life before the ruthless Roman ruler Pilate.

Jesus tells Pilate “If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here.”

It is the way of our world to fight, to seek revenge and retribution, to forcibly resist anything that frightens us.

In our life in this world there are times when it may be necessary to resist and use force.

And yet, this image of Jesus, a king who does not fight, gives us a glimpse of God’s kingdom:

- in which violence is overcome by mercy,
- hatred is conquered by love,
- and darkness is pierced by light.
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This shows us that there is another way to respond to things that threaten and alarm us. Seeing this other way of being can re-shape our instinctive, fear based reactions and re-orient our lives in this brutal and beautiful world.

We need images of God’s kingdom amidst all the other images of our lives, especially given the news these past weeks.

This is why we gather for worship. In worship, we get glimpses and tastes of God’s kingdom.

And just as glimpses of other cultures can re-orient us, our experiences with God’s kingdom in worship can re-shape and re-form us in the ways of God.

When we meet people from other cultures, we’re often amazed by complete strangers who welcome, feed and care for us. Experiencing such hospitality can inspire us to open our hearts and homes to others.

The same kind of thing can happen for us at worship.

Here we experience what it is to be unworthy and yet welcomed to the table.

Here we experience abundant welcome and we learn God’s kingdom’s ways of welcoming and feeding all people.

In cross cultural encounters, we hear and sometimes learn to speak different languages. The same thing happens for us in worship.

The language of God’s kingdom is radically different from that of our “dog eat dog”, “look out for #1”, “stand your ground”, “fight fire with fire” world. The language of God’s kingdom is mercy, forgiveness, grace and abundance.

In worship, we are forgiven and called to forgive.

We learn to pray for ourselves and for the whole world, even our enemies.

We learn to praise and give thanks in all circumstances, in defiance of all the forces of fear and violence within and around us.

When we meet people from other places, we also often taste different foods.

The same thing happens for us in worship. Here we taste the death of the one who gave himself in love - the body of Christ given for you, the blood of Christ shed for you.

We taste resurrection, as the risen Christ is present here with us in his body and blood. We taste forgiveness.

We get a foretaste of the feast we will share with all the saints around the throne of God.

We discover that we don't need much, and that our needs will be met.

Yet another thing that can happen in cross cultural encounters is a re-orientation of our experience of time.

In many parts of the world, people don't view time as an oppressive task master or a commodity to be managed so they can accomplish more. Instead, they trust there will be enough time to help a neighbor, to stop for a conversation.

This can be both disorienting and life giving for Americans.

In worship, we're also invited into a different relationship with time.

We're invited to mark time not in minutes, hours, work weeks, school years and fiscal years but in the seasons of the church year.

Each year as we move through these seasons, we get to enter and experience the story of God and God's coming kingdom. We don't just hear about it in scripture, we live it in the seasons of the church year.

The colors and seasons of the church year can often seem really foreign and strange. So today, on the last Sunday of the church year, with colors and images from each season displayed, it is a good time to think about the church year, starting with Advent which begins next week.

Advent means coming, and in Advent we learn to wait with hope for the coming of God's kingdom - in Jesus' birth and at the end of time.

The color of Advent is deep blue - the color of the winter sky just before dawn, the color of hope.

The dawn of hope comes at Christmas when we see the kingdom's truth that light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.

The color is white to remind us of this light.

In Epiphany, which means appearing, we celebrate that light shining brightly for all the world.

The color is white and then green to celebrate the life that comes from Christ's light.

Then we enter the time of Lent when we repent of all the ways we don't live in the kingdom ways of being. We see how the ways of the world lead to death for Jesus and for us. The color is purple, the color of repentance.

Then comes Easter where life and light burst out and we discover that even death cannot stop God and God's kingdom ways of life and love.

The color is again white with the color of joy, gold.

After Easter, the red fire of the Spirit is poured out at Pentecost. Then, in the season after Pentecost we return to green to reflect on our growth and life in kingdom ways of being.

These colors and symbols remind us that in worship we encounter and are shaped by God's kingdom ways.

Most of all, in worship we encounter the living God, the one who can truly transform us into kingdom ways of being.

Here we are welcomed, taught, fed, healed and sent out to live kingdom ways of being.

Thanks be to God, Amen