

November 21, 2021

**“A Very Different Kind of Realm”
Sermon by Rev. Susan Drake**

Psalm 93

*YHWH (ya-way) reigns, robed in splendor?
You are robed, YHWH, and armed with strength.
The world stands firm and cannot be moved;
your throne stands firm from ages past;
from eternity you exist.
The seas are shouting, YHWH
the seas raise their voices;
the seas shout with pounding waves.
Stronger than the thunder of the great waters,
mightier than the breakers of the sea,
mightiest of all is YHWH
Your reign was made known from of old;
the holy ones praise you in your Temple,
YHWH, for days without end*

Colossians 3:15-17

*And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body.
And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in
all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God.
And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of Jesus, giving thanks to God
through Christ.*

John 18:33-37

*Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, “Are you the King
of the Jews?” Jesus answered, “Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?”
Pilate replied, “I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the temple authorities have handed
you over to me. What have you done?” Jesus answered, “My realm is not from this world. If my
realm were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to
the temple authorities. But as it is, my realm is not from here.” Pilate asked him, “So you are a
king?” Jesus answered, “You say that I am a King. For this I was born, and for this I came into
the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.”*

Sermon “A Very Different Kind of Realm”

This week, the last Sunday in the liturgical year is traditionally called the “Reign of Christ Sunday.” I have always struggled theologically with this idea because it perpetuates old language that is truly not relevant in our time and in our country.

We don't have a King, or an Emperor and hopefully we never will. These metaphors were created at a time when people did, when the power structures were ruler and subjects, master and slaves. Now don't get me wrong, society is still messed up in a big way but most of us have never had a king or queen.

But what bothers me more than that, is that I don't think being called King Jesus is what Jesus wanted. We see that in this text from John. Pilate is trying to force Jesus into answering this question, "So are you the king?"

But Jesus refuses to play. He refuses to put himself in a simple box of "I am a ruler and my people are servants" because that is not what he is about, he has never claimed to be, and has rebuffed claims that would force him to participate in the power structures of this world.

Instead he says, according to John, that his realm is not from here. His realm is the spiritual realm. You can think of that as heaven, but for me it is both the afterlife and the place I can go inside myself and with others and connect to God, connect to peace, hope, and joy and leave behind the chaos we find ourselves surrounded by.

Then when I return to the worldly realm I have the strength to try and be my best self as I walk through that chaos and strive for justice for all of God's people

I have a really good friend that I can talk about anything with and have done so for over 20 years. I am myself when I am on the phone with her. She has heard me rage, she has heard me cry, and cuss, and be troubled. Whenever we are finished talking about the hard stuff I find I have peace again.

The next thing I know we are laughing and making jokes, and poking fun of ourselves about how low we can go, before we reach out to God for help or reach out to others for support.

I talked with her the other day and I was in a fizzy, a combination of tizzy and funk. I told her I wanted to write a sermon about gratitude but I couldn't feel anything right now. I said no matter how many times I went through the list of all the blessings in my life, that I just felt numb from the pandemic and from all of the injustice in our world.

I'm numb from walking through the hospital where beds line the hallways of the ER, people waiting to be admitted because we have no room.

I told her how many times this week I have had to witness the fatigue, the tears, and the burnout of our staff as I walk through our full ICU, every person on a ventilator. I get numb from frustration because I know that some of the deaths were preventable.

I told my friend that I was having trouble being the "light bringer" in that place, trouble leaving my office and going to walk in the midst of the suffering. I try to avoid the news sometimes because there is so much hate and injustice that is beyond my comprehension and seems so desperately wrong.

Then I asked her again how the heck I was supposed to write a sermon for Sunday on “Gratitude” while this is going on and that I feel so crazy.

Now it doesn’t hurt that my friend is a retired therapist. She told me “Susan, first remember you are not crazy, we are living and surviving through a crazy time in history and there is a big difference. She told me to just get up there and tell all of you how I am surviving and how I have survived the last 20 months”.

I told her I have survived because I have God, and because I have had a parallel life to that of the hospital. I have survived because of a loving home and because of all of you. Because on Tuesdays, Fridays, and Sundays I get to get up and do something I love that feeds me, inspires me and gives me hope. I have survived because the people in my church believe in love and justice too and because I get to be their Pastor.

She said so does that mean you are g-r-a-t-e-f-u-l for them. “Yes” I mumbled, “well start there”, she said, “start there”. Once I thought about it I felt like I was snatched up out of my funk and transplanted back into the realm of God. I have experienced that realm in the midst of all of you. You have been instrumental in helping me to hope, inspired me to practice what I preach and go be love, wherever I am and you pray for me.

Reminding ourselves of what we are grateful for is one of the greatest spiritual coping mechanisms that God gave us. It truly moves us from fear, from anger, from feeling overwhelmed, to feeling like we are going to be okay. We don’t know when, but we will be okay, if not in this realm then in the next. When we have that hope we will have the strength to continue to fight the good fight and speak out against injustice and hate.

I’m listening to a great book on tape by “Tony Horwitz called “A Voyage Long and Strange”. It is a fascinating book where the author travels to all the places on the continent of America where Europeans first landed. He doesn’t rewrite history as much as fleshes it out with stories and the latest from historical scholars.

He started with the vikings landing in the far Northern part of the continent and then talks about Columbus. There is so much more to this man than “he sailed the ocean blue in 1492” as we learned about in school.

He portrays him as neither hero nor mass murderer as more recent claims have been, but rather a very fallible human being whose presence did mark the beginning of a very bloody and greedy part of the history of this continent where the echos can still be heard today. What I found most interesting was Columbus’ original journals.

He wrote about his first journey. He set out to find a direct route by sea to Asia. He was thinking it would be a few weeks so was supplied for a much shorter journey. The actual time took 61 days.

His men as well were expecting a journey half as long. Each day they would look out for signs of land, signs for the distant shore, but there was no end in sight. They became hungry and stir crazy and felt betrayed by their leaders who kept saying any day now this journey will be over.

Each day they would get up with hope and go to bed hungry, disappointed, and mad. So what did they do? They started to turn on each other and on their leaders. They couldn't handle not being able to know when their struggle would be over, when they would finally reach the other side and it wore on them and stole their hope.

The fact is that if it had taken much longer, their journey would have ended in mutiny and starvation. But finally they did reach what is the present day Bahamas though Columbus died still believing that they had landed on the other side of the Asian Continent.

Who knows if it would have been better for America if they hadn't made it, but Horowitz points out that if it hadn't been him it would have been someone else who arrived with sword in hand, greed in their heart, and the idea that all native people should be converted to Christianity whether they liked it or not.

My point in telling this story is that all of us thought we would be done with this pandemic by now. We have borne witness to some of the ugliness in the human heart when we can't see the distant shore, when we wake up with hope and go to bed disappointed. When we can see an end to our troubles.

But we have to remember who is the wind in our sails? Who is the ocean and tides below us? As the psalmist wrote: "Stronger than the thunder of the great waters, mightier than the breakers of the sea, mightiest of all is YHWH."

When you get down, whether from the pandemic, or from all the losses you all have had, or from illness, or social injustice, or the selfishness and hatred that abounds, call a friend or write down all the stuff that has you in a funk and then start another list.

Something like this, God, I am grateful for you, for Jesus, for my family, for my church, my home, my pets. I am grateful for love, and rivers, lakes, birds, the moon, and the stars.

I promise you that you will start feeling like you are living in the realm of God again, the realm of love and hope, and you will be able to get up in the morning and be the bringer of light and love again to the world around you even in a very crazy time in human history. AMEN

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