

Christ the King
Wicker Park Lutheran Church
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November 25, 2018

Do you remember what you were doing on December 31, 1999?

I was at home with my parents and my sister. Some of our neighbors came over, too. I was also in the 5th grade, so the sparkling cider was flowing and there's a real chance I wasn't actually up until midnight.

Maybe you remember where you were, what you were doing, but I'm sure that why you might remember this particular New Years Eve over against some others has to do with what many were *feeling* on New Years Eve 1999.

There was a particular anticipation around that day... an anxiety, a fear, a wondering.

Were our computers going to work the next day?

What about bank accounts? Phones?

Would all our systems we relied so heavily on come crashing down?

What was going to happen?

Today is something of our New Year's Eve, church. This Sunday marks the last Sunday in our church calendar year.

We started a year ago in **Advent**, where we waited for Christ's coming into the world.

We moved into **Christmas** when we celebrated Immanuel, God with and among us.

Then came **Epiphany** when the wise men traveled from far off places to greet Jesus.

Suddenly we were in **Lent**, a time of wandering in the wilderness, of drawing closer to God.

Through Holy Week we remembered Christ's passion, his death on the cross.

And at **Easter** we celebrated that Christ's resurrection, that sin and death are not the end.

And then **Pentecost**, when the fiery tongues came upon the disciples, when we celebrate the gifts of the Spirit that reside with Her people.

And that's where we've been most recently. We've been in the twenty-something weeks of Pentecost. We've encountered a lot in this year together: joys and challenges, baptisms and funerals. We've witnessed hope and heartache in this place and in the world around us. And together, we find ourselves at the end of another liturgical year, New Year's Eve.

In 1999 fear took root among a lot of people. People worried, feared the worst, and we know what a powerful tool fear is. It divides people, it isolates people.

People profited off of that fear. Scams abounded, people promising to help you protect your information, promising to safeguard your computers from impending doom, the y2k bug. Doomsayers stockpiled on food and weapons.

I don't know if you know the origins of this particular Sunday we celebrate today, but I found it interesting. Reign of Christ Sunday is actually a fairly "new" feast day. (When we're working with 2000 years of church history, new is a relative term) But Reign of Christ Sunday was instituted by Pope Pius XI in 1925.

His reason?

Reign of Christ Sunday was birthed in response to a growing climate of nationalism and fascism. It was started to remind the church of Christ's power and sovereignty in a world that was becoming increasingly fractured by fear and isolation.

Reign of Christ is when we are reminded that God's rule is not like that of rulers we see rising up around us. We are reminded, before we head into the new year, into Advent next week, we are reminded who this king is for which we will be waiting. Christ rules with love, not with fear, a love that dwells in community, not in isolation.

And that's a scary thing for the ruling elite we encounter in today's gospel. Jesus lived out another way of being together, a way that shone a light on the true nature of the law. Jesus lived in accordance with God's law of love and justice and mercy. Those in power had taken "God's law" and used it to justify oppression and greed. As Christ lived, his way of living out God's reign was seen as a threat to the ruling religious elite. And the fear that they felt is what led to Jesus' death.

It is important for us to remember this, especially today. Next week, we'll start singing hymns about longing for Christ to come. We must remember, though, who it is we are longing for. We are longing for the one who rules with an attention to the ones who are looked over and neglected. We are longing for the one whose law of love will change everything.

That's what we're waiting for.

This was a message for early Christians, it was a message for Christians in the face of dangerous nationalism in the 1920's, and it is a message for us here today.

One reason I've stayed Lutheran is our ability to live within tensions. We love a good paradox as Lutherans.

One such tension that I have come to love is the already and not yet. We believe that the kingdom of God is already here and now among us, and that it is not here yet in its fullest. There are times when we see the kingdom among us, when we feel its closeness, and there are times when we see so clearly that we aren't there yet.

One thing I remember from New Year's Eve 1999 is being together with my family and our neighbors from up the street. I remember eating hamburgers together. I remember doing the things we always did as kids when we were together—making up skits and performing them

for our parents. I remember the talk of *what might happen* that surrounded that night, but what I remember most is being with the people I loved and doing what we did every New Year's Eve.

This, I think, is a picture of this paradox. We gather, in spite of the messages that surround us, telling us to be afraid, to fend for ourselves first, we gather. We gather to remember who we are and who God is. We get glimpses of the kingdom when we gather together, when we share in a meal, when together we spur one another on in our baptismal promises of working for a world that reflects Christ's reign of justice and peace. And how perfect of a time for us to come together to glimpse the kingdom that is so close than on this last day of the church year.

It's New Year's Eve, friends. Let's stand together and testify to the one whose love casts out fear, whose power unites, not divides, whose kingdom is so close among us.