

When I think about Christ as King, I hear angels singing the Hallelujah Chorus from Handel's Messiah. I imagine a heavenly venue where Jesus is on a throne waving a royal wave to all who are entering the pearly gates and bowing low to the divine majesty. Then, I stop daydreaming and realize that Christ's kingship and reign and sovereignty is less about pomp and circumstance and more about personal and societal transformation. That's also when I realize that planning an event full of pomp and circumstance is a much easier task than thinking about how to transform myself and society. Yet, it is the latter that comes closest to Jesus' ideas about the reign of God.

Let's take a moment and review everything we've been told about the kingdom of God in the gospel of Luke. Jesus tells us that the kingdom is about a sower who sows seeds on all types of ground. It is something that should be put where everyone can see it – like a lamp on a lampstand. It is like a widow searching for a lost coin and a shepherd abandoning the flock to look for the lost sheep.

The kingdom provides restoration: people healed of unclean spirits, leprosy, paralysis, and other ailments. People healed and then restored to their places in society where they had been cast out before. In the kingdom of God, children are welcome; people are fed; enemies become rescuers; sinners are forgiven; and risks are taken with gifts of value.

Jesus described the kingdom of God in words and actions that could be accessed by all people. He used humor, healing, and hope. He brought attention to the radical love of God through public actions and peaceful, but powerful, demonstrations. (Kurt Struckmeyer/FollowingJesus.org)

The characters in the stories and parables of Luke's gospel, whether they recognize it, hunger for God and the wholeness a relationship with God brings. That hunger enabled them to subordinate their personal priorities in exchange for God's priorities. That hunger took Jesus to a mountaintop for strength. It enabled Jesus to lead his followers into Jerusalem and to endure the shame and agony of the cross. That hunger made it possible for the apostles to continue living the way of Jesus after his mystical ascension.

As I reflect on all this, I remember the leadership of Jesus as described by Laurie Beth Jones*:

- Jesus knew his mission. He knew who he was AND he was open to hearing from others. He believed in himself and knew what he needed to do to keep himself refreshed and ready to lead.
- Jesus actively lead out of his mission of spreading the kingdom of God. He was creative, he pushed against and even broke open social boundaries, and allowed his own worldview to be challenged. His teachings made it possible for the apostles to pick up where he left off, using the gifts and talents God had given to each of them.
- Jesus valued relationships above everything else. He loved people even when they disappointed them. He forgave them when they messed up. He stuck with the disciples despite their failings and lack of understanding. People followed Jesus because he loved them, and they knew it.

*in *Jesus, CEO*

When we look at the leadership example of Jesus we witness the mission/the reign/the kingdom of God:

Love each other. Care for each other. Forgive each other.

Treasure each other. Do this in every action you take.

Do this remembering Jesus did it for us first.

Do you have a personal plan on how to communicate the radical and transforming love of God in your world? That's the question I'm going to be asking myself this Advent. How do I prepare for the child that will embody all that is God? What kind of relationship do I want with Him? How will that relationship make a difference in me and in people around me?

I ask you all to ponder this in your hearts as well. The actions, reactions, movements, and reconsiderations of our lives together this past year has brought to fore our need as a parish to be clear about what we believe God wants us to be and do in this part of the kingdom called Bethesda/Bannockburn. Until we are clear about that, moving furniture, building storage areas, and crafting budgets are just rafts amid raging waters.

It is time to discern what impact Redeemer should make in this neighborhood. To do that requires us to be honest with each other about what needs are out there and what gifts we need to nurture to address those needs.

It is time to acknowledge that we may need to give things up in order to heed God's call to do something new or differently. It is time to acknowledge our flaws and brokenness and ask for forgiveness and healing from God and from each other. It is time to be brave, and vulnerable, and to take risks. We will need to pray for each other through this process.

We are in a good place, especially compared to so many of our sister parishes. Let's be thankful for that and appreciate that. In the new year, we'll begin conversations in this regard so that the vestry can plan our next steps. I ask you to pray about what God has in mind for Redeemer and how you will be called to participate. The gifts and talents of every person is important.

The reign of God is here. Christ is coming.

It is time to prepare for the way of the Lord. Amen.