Sermon on The Reign of Christ 2018
**How are You Living Your “Dash?”**

Two unrelated facts had come together and something needed to change.

There was of course the great fact: the Great War; WW1. It’s hard to overestimate its effects, effects we still feel today; many other catastrophes, including the breakup of the former Ottoman Empire into nation states like Syria, Iraq, Lebanon and Palestine; the rise of Communism in Russia and then elsewhere and, of course WWII itself, draw their poison from Christian Civilization deciding to tear itself apart.

So that’s the one huge fact; the other was, in some way just as momentous but not nearly as in your face as war; it was the discovery, possibly re-discovery, that the main message Jesus preaches about in the Matthew, Mark and Luke is not the Cross (point to it) but something he called the Kingdom of Heaven or the Kingdom of God.

Just so I’m clear, it’s not that the cross is unimportant, clearly it is; it’s just that Jesus himself spends far more time and energy talking about the Kingdom of God, the Reign of God as a process that no human institution can control or fully understand. The Cross is something, as important as it is, that must be understood within the larger reality, the Reign of God; understand that way, it is a result of, a symptom of how God Reigns.

North Atlantic Christianity with its sense of privileged superiority that had given birth to Western Civilization, a superiority which justified her missionaries to its colonies lay shattered in Flanders fields.

Now, the scholarly status quo was being renewed, Jesus himself, seen somewhat differently than before.

The two facts came together; perhaps, to use language from our gospel, it was time to listen to him once more

Perhaps, the Spirit whispered, what was needed was not a refocused attention on what had happened in past centuries but on what was yet possible!

That Jesus was more concerned in his teaching with something akin to a process than an accomplished fact struck the church universal as something of a revelation.

And so in 1925, led by the Pope, many of the world’s larger denominations inaugurated a new feast, Christ the King.

The feast of possibilities not yet realized, the feast of becoming, a feast that just might help the church make sense of the reality that with all she had accomplished it apparently wasn’t nearly enough. Just so a feast that fits our parish reality perfectly!

This was more fully recognized when, in 1969, Pope Paul VI changed its name to the Reign of Christ and moved it to the last Sunday of the Church Year.

November is the month of my mother’s death and when I go to her graveside I notice again that strange feature that adorns almost every gravestone: the date of birth, the date of death and in between a single small indent, a dash.

That little line which says nothing and gives no clues, stands for the whole ambiguous process of becoming that was that person’s life whether tragic, triumphant, happy or despairing, good or evil.

That little line is a powerful symbol of this feast; so today we ask, how do we imagine, in our day, that God, that Christ is “becoming?” What’s God up to in the world? How do we imagine the “divine dash?” Just so, who are we “becoming?” How do we imagine our personal and parish “dash?”

We are not the first to struggle with this question. How did the persecuted Christians under Emperor Domitian in around 95 CE imagine reign? Our text from Revelation gives us a partial answer.

How did Europe in 1925? How do Christians in Canada in 2018 imagine God’s Reign, with our addiction to the anxieties that fill our minds with dread?

The gospel text is truly evocative of the process? It presents, in the figure of Christ an analogy to God’s Reign and the people called to cooperate with it.

The analogy is one of threat: Christ, Christ’s people and the very process of God reclaiming a world for divine love and justice appears on the edge of irrelevance, worse destruction.

Like Christ in this text, we seem to face the hopeless task of redefining the central term that our culture idolizes and bows down to: power. In Pilate’s mind, perhaps in our minds: it’s the one with the centurions, the one with the drones, the machines of war, the one who makes the economic rules and shapes the affairs of men, that’s the one with power.

In God’s mind, something very different: someone very different, a man willing to go to a cross not simply because he’s weak but because he’s playing a much bigger game.

He will in his death, set in motion a series of events and ideas that will one day mean chattel slaves walk free, that women begin to be spoken of and acted toward with greater equality, that ordinary people begin to recognize that they have rights that should be protected, that no class, race, gender is lesser in worth.

Of course God’s Reign does not unfold in some progressive linear fashion but in some sort of two steps forward, five steps back, four forward and three sideways, if you get my drift.

Not a gradual assured victory for those who confess Christ’s name but a continual call to risk fellowship with the truth; a promise that in all who seek truth—notice the universality offered here—Christ himself present! “Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice!” Whether knowingly or not!

A belonging that is deeper and richer and more compelling than any of the lesser gods that capture our wandering eyes.

This is how God is living her dash, how Christ is defining his “becoming!” The Reign of God is not equated with mere possibility for change; it is not the sum total of the positive changes humankind has made and continues to make in the face of its most immense challenges and disasters.

The Reign of God works in and through all those who belong to the truth, but, and this should give us great hope, it will come to fruition in a way that humans could never achieve.

On our own, we cooperate with God’s Reign in the small ways that God has called to do it; by becoming stewards of our time, our treasure and talents, by raising children and grandchildren who care about others, by taking care of each other and by reaching out to make a difference through organizations that have a wider reach.

Sometimes I get discouraged, sometimes, I know, you get discouraged. I am helped by the fact that when I look at us this morning, however unlikely it seems, we are a kingdom and we’re here on account of our King who in his mercy and righteousness rules all other Kings and rulers.

The reign of God, that great process of becoming by which Christ came to expose all history’s victims promises not just to bring their victimhood to light but to do right by them in a way that only God can will happen

It’s why we work at Stewardship, why our giving, in terms of time, talent and treasure is never in vain, even when the world seems to be in one of its phases of taking steps back rather than forward!

My therapist and I like to have the conversation about how real change happens in us. She’ll say, it’s not enough to get an idea, it’s not even enough to begin practicing that idea, you finally have to struggle with it, with it’s implications, with it’s depth, then you’ll change.

So, she’ll ask, “where are you struggling now?” That’s the Reign of God, Christ standing before Pilate in weakness, speaking with him in good faith but struggling to help Pilate “get it” all the while knowing that Pilate will choose not to; that it’s much easier for Pilate to simply dispose of him then listen to him. What amazing courage Christ had in that moment!

So, where are you struggling today? Is it in one of the stewardship commitments? Is it in relationships? Welcome to the Reign of God, welcome to the “becoming” that will change your heart! If you let it!

Pilate’s struggle, your struggle, is Christ standing before you and speaking, so ask your questions, lament your frustration, rail on about the ambiguity of the process; he can take it!

He can because that’s how Christ is living his dash, he’s in the struggle right now, deep in the struggle, testifying to the truth, becoming the King found in all who struggle with him.

So let’s offer ourselves again as Stewards of God’s Reign, let’s listen with joy for the voice of truth in this Eucharist and let’s go to our council meetings this week, our discussions in our family and at our workplaces with renewed trust in God’s Reign in and through us.