

Rev. Lynne Ogren                      Zion Lutheran Church, Lewistown, MT  
November 22, 2020                      Christ the King Sunday, Year A  
Ephesians 1:15-23; Matthew 25:31-46

Our first reading is a letter to communities in the early church. It begins with a word of thanksgiving and encouragement. I will read this passage again, threading it throughout the sermon, so that it can be heard as a message for us today. The letter begins with this greeting.

*1:1b To the saints who are in [Central Montana] and are faithful to Christ Jesus:*

*2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.*

*15 I have [witnessed] your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, and for this reason I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers.*

A couple of weeks ago, one of our members came to me and said, "I have an idea! I would like to get a group of people to make phone calls to our members on behalf of the church. There are so many who can't come to worship these days and we want them to know they are remembered."

Back in August, as our school year was about to start, several of our retired teachers each adopted a current teacher or school staff person from our congregation to send cards of encouragement, knowing this would be a particularly difficult year.

Last week our Caring and Social Ministry committee created some silk flower arrangements and delivered them to our homebound and nursing care members. I spoke with one of the ladies who received an arrangement and she was delighted!

One of our Zion kids has been writing letters since the pandemic started. I have received two of those letters! Another member brought me a decorated pumpkin, with a cute painted face and silk flowers glued on. She brought it on a day that was particularly difficult and she seemed to know that I needed a lift.

I have witnessed your love toward all the saints, and for this reason I do not cease to give thanks for you!

*17 I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him...*

Our Confirmation youth are looking at the Apostles' Creed. This week was about the 2<sup>nd</sup> article: "I believe in Jesus Christ..." We reenacted the story of the Road to Emmaus when two disciples were headed home from Jerusalem after Jesus' death. They had heard of his resurrection but didn't know if it was true.

As they traveled, they talked about all that had happened in those last days, and probably over those few years of Jesus' ministry, too. They might have talked about the miracles, his teachings, and his love for the outsider.

Then Jesus joined them on the road and reminded them of the words of the prophets who pointed toward the coming Messiah. But it was in their home, when Jesus broke and blessed the bread, that they recognized him!

The kids and I talked about how we can recognize Jesus among us today. And one of our insightful young people said, "Well, we need to get to know him."

In this letter, we are told that we will receive a spirit of wisdom as we come to know Jesus Christ. Forming any relationship takes time and attention. So I have an invitation for you.

Next week we will begin the season of Advent, those four weeks that carry us to the celebration of Christ's birth. Some of you may have Advent calendars or light the candles on an Advent wreath during this time.

What if we spent some time in Scripture this month, getting to know Jesus even more intimately? I will be taking up the practice of reading through the gospel according to John. There are 21 chapters, so we can read a chapter a day, skipping Sundays, and get through the whole gospel by Dec. 25<sup>th</sup>. I will be posting some reflection questions on our Zion Facebook page, and I'll send them out on the E-News as well. Together, as a community of believers, we can "come to know" Jesus better.

*[Then], with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you...*

As we grow in our relationship with Christ, our eyes are "enlightened" to see as Jesus sees, so that we may love as Jesus loves. Then, as we heard in the gospel reading, we learn to see Christ in the eyes of our neighbors.

This week a team of people in our congregation began a process through the Montana Synod called "Faithful Innovations." The idea is to take a look at our life together as a congregation through the eyes of Christ, and to open ourselves to being innovative in the ministry God calls us to do in this time and this place.

Our first task over the next few months is to ask the question, "When is a time you have felt spiritually alive? And how was the church a part of that time in your life...or not?" Someone from our team might engage you in this conversation, so you might start thinking about when have you known the presence of Christ in your life. When have you recognized God's power? When has the church truly served as the body of Christ for you?

*[The hope to which we are called through Christ includes] the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints,<sup>19</sup> and ... the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power.*

We live in a time when hope seems far off.

We now have hope for a vaccine for the coronavirus, but for most of us, that day is still several months off as the front-line workers and the most vulnerable will receive it first. The hope for unity and civility in our country and government may also seem far off.

The hope and the promise of the “glorious inheritance” we have as the saints of God, comes to us, not by our own power, but by “the immeasurable greatness of [Christ], for us who believe.” The hope and power we receive through faith in Jesus Christ, are not just for us alone as God’s saints.

They are for us to share with the world as we invite and include those who have no hope, those who have no power, those who do not know the Savior we have come to know and love and in whom we place our trust for a glorious new day.

*<sup>20</sup>God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, <sup>21</sup>far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come.*

As God’s chosen people, holy and beloved of God, we must always remember that it is God’s power, known in Jesus’ resurrection from the dead, where we place our ultimate trust. We trust in Christ’s authority and power and dominion above all earthly leaders, whose terms will begin and end again and again. God’s power is eternal, and will carry us from this age, that can be numbered by days and years, to the age to come in God’s kingdom that has no end.

In the meantime, we engage in the systems and structures in our world, and support the leaders who are elected into office or are appointed by just and fair processes. We are to seek justice for the oppressed and work for peace whenever we can. Ultimately, we are called to place our hope and trust in God’s power made known in Jesus Christ.

*<sup>22</sup>And [God] has put all things under [Christ’s] feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, <sup>23</sup>which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.*

Christ came into the world in all its darkness to shine the light of hope, faith, and love of our powerful and gracious God. We are the church, the body of Christ who has empowered us to share his light with the world through our acts of hospitality and grace.

As we journey to the manger in Bethlehem once again to receive our king, let us recommit to knowing Jesus and trusting in his power so that we would learn to see the world through his eyes, as we serve as Christ’s body to a world in need.

Thanks be to God! Amen

## **Prayers of Intercession**

Longing for Christ's reign to come among us, we pray for the outpouring of God's power on the church, the world, and all in need.

*A brief silence.*

God of all, train our ears to hear your cry in the needs of those around us. Bless all social ministries of the church through which we seek to serve others as we ourselves have been served, especially the Heart of Montana Love INC, as they partner with local churches to extend your love in the name of Christ. Gracious God,  
**your kingdom come.**

God of justice, bring peace to every place where conflict rages. Grant opportunities for ending divisions among us and usher in your reign of unity and reconciliation. Gracious God,  
**your kingdom come.**

God of light, bring hope to those who are hungry, poor, and imprisoned in any way that keeps them from living the fullness of life you intend for your children. Grant healing to the sick, comfort to the grieving, and strength for the weak. We pray especially for those listed in our bulletin today and those we name now in our hearts... Gracious God,  
**your kingdom come.**

God of promise, pour out the gifts of your Spirit on this congregation as we grow in faith toward you and love for our neighbor. Open our eyes to see the needs in our community so that we would serve as the body of Christ in this place and time. Bless the efforts of our Faithful Innovations team and help us all to seek your will in our life together. Gracious God,  
**your kingdom come.**

Thank you for saints now departed who fed the hungry, clothed the naked, and tended to the sick. Inspire us by their example, that we may see your presence in those in need around us and are moved by your Spirit to acts of love. Gracious God,  
**your kingdom come.**

Receive our prayers in the name of Jesus Christ our Savior, until that day when you gather all creation around your throne where you will reign forever and ever.  
**Amen.**