

Today we celebrate the Reign of Christ the King. It is the last Sunday of the Liturgical Year and the last Sunday before Advent – when we wait in expectation for the arrival of the Messiah. This past year we have heard the re-telling of the stories of Jesus’ birth, His ministries of teaching and healing, His crucifixion, resurrection and ascension and what all of this means for our personal lives and the life of the Church.

While the Reign of Christ the King is not specifically identified in the Bible, it affords us the opportunity to look back at what Christ has wrought in our lives over the past year. It is a time when we must stop and take stock and ask ourselves if Christ, who took our place upon the cross and suffered death for our redemption and sits on the right hand of God until his coming again, is truly the King of our lives.

But we cannot stop there. After taking stock, we must look at the findings from having “taken stock” and see how best we can move forward in the future to make things better for us as individuals but more so for the community of faith that we call our church.

Many years ago I made the conscious decision that Christ would form the centre of my life and I try to live my life in accordance with the tenets of my Christian faith. I cannot say that it is always easy or that I always succeed - sometimes I fall flat on my face.

Having Christ in my life allows me, with God’s grace, to maneuver the highways and byways of life and to know that I have a source to go to for strength and guidance when I am feeling down. A few weeks ago when I was experiencing a down moment, Jesus sat on my bed and had a conversation with me. While I cannot recall the conversation, the last five words have remained with me. He said “I have always loved you”. The fact that these are the only words I remember is all that I needed to hear and know.

As I look back over this past liturgical year, I am thankful for life, for my family, and for the blessings that have been bestowed on me. They have not been great in terms of wealth and riches – these are not things I am seeking. I am seeking the Kingdom of God, first and foremost. As a working person and student of theology, I am grateful to God for his grace in giving me the strength and courage to manage working and studying, and for the experience of being among students, both young and old, who have a passion for and love of Christ and are not afraid to express or share their witness with others. I am thankful for my Church – a place to gather with like-minded Christians to praise and honour God and to give Him his due.

In verse 1:17-19 of today’s Epistle, Paul’s prayer for the Ephesians was 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, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power”. While this prayer is a lot to unpack theologically, Paul’s pray for the Church is that God will illumine the eyes of our hearts - so that with the help of the Holy Spirit, we can see with new eyes and be able to discern the mind of Christ – to see the whole and not with our own fragmented vision.

What are we expected to see? We are expected to see the hope to which God is calling us - hope for all creation, the hope of unity and reconciliation which is the essence of the gospel. We are to see the role of the church in God’s plan – a plan that we are called to actively participate in and not be onlookers. Our faith is not for our own benefit, but that we might participate with God in the hope of the world.

What is the hope to which Christ has called us here at Grace? We have occupied this building now for just over a year. For some of us the move to this location has not been easy. The amalgamation of the four churches has not been an easy road for many of us. I cannot say that initially I liked this space – but have to

“somewhat” admit it is beginning to grow on me [Someone told me it would in time]. In spite of how I felt about the space, I know it is not the Church; it is just a building that allows us to come together as a community to worship God. Some weeks ago while having a conversation with Father David I happened to mention the crack that is visible on the south-west wall in the worship space and he replied that there were other cracks in some of the walls that resulted from the building having undergone stress and it needs to settle. This past year saw us settling into this building that we call our “new home”. But three years into our amalgamation I have to ask, are we settled? Or are we, like the building, still have “cracks” that must be attended to, to allow us to “settle? If that is the case, what must be done to enable us to settle as a community – to become unified and live out the gospel message that we are called to share? What are we willing to settle for?

As far as I know, we have already settled on the second person of the Trinity, Jesus Christ, otherwise perhaps we would not be here. Now the question is are we going to continue to wallow about the past? Are we going to be like the Israelites who were delivered from Egypt and given the opportunity to have a new life – a new beginning - but grumbled at every turn and remembered the good old days in Egypt!

In a short while from now we will profess our faith by saying the Apostles Creed – I believe in God, the Father the Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and in his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord ... If Christ is the King of our lives, then as a community of faith we have a responsibility at this time, and for a time such as this, to come to grips with the past – we will always have our memories of our former lives locked away in our hearts that we can revisit and reminisce about – these cannot be taken away from us. What is done is done! We cannot and should not want to repeat the past. We have today and tomorrow to make a difference so that we do not end up from whence we came.

As we close this liturgical year and look forward to the next, we have our work cut out for us. I think that it is important for each and every one of us to be mindful that we are the church - not the building or certain individuals. We all have a stake in the life and working of our church. Our personal nostalgias must be set aside for the unity and good of all. [I would venture to suggest that after service today, those of us who are staying for the luncheon make an intentional effort not to sit with our “family/buddies” but to find others who we do not usually converse with, to sit and eat with them, and to engage in constructive conversation about what resolutions you would make for the coming year for our church.]

In the past we have been talking about Adult Education and Faith Development, Pastoral Visiting and Outreach and Mission Ministries. I am sure that there are others, but I think that these could be good starters for launching in the New Year. The first, Adult Education will give us an opportunity to come together and prepare ourselves internally for the work that must be done in the external community through Pastoral Visiting and Outreach to our community. [I should note that the recently concluded Bible Study on Ephesians facilitated by Rev. Graham McCaffrey on what it means to be the Church of Jesus Christ, more generally but also specifically as Grace Church, Scarborough was a start and should be developed further and continued throughout the year.] Like everything else in our lives, these will call for commitment – commitment of our time, our talents and our money – yes that “bad word” that we do not like to hear in church “money”.

If we say and believe that Christ is the King of our lives, as the community of Grace Church we need to see with the eyes of our hearts the many possibilities that await us here at Grace in being Jesus’ agents here on earth. The Gospel according to Matthew for today reminds us of our responsibility to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, tend the sick, welcome strangers and visit prisoners – the marginalized who are close to God’s heart. As we end this year and look back on Christ’s reign in our lives and discern how we are being called to a different way of being in the world for a time such as this, may we turn our gaze from inward self-care to outward care for the lost, the lonely and the left-behind of South Scarborough.