

Sermon for Christ the King Sunday

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A few nights ago, I did my typical routine of napping midafternoon and then following that grand accomplishment with an 8:30 bedtime. My life is an absolute firecracker. Well, I went to bed at around 8:30, and then without any reason I could suss out, I woke up at 1:00 am, bright eyed and bushy tailed. It wasn't what I'd had for dinner. That was delicious but fairly benign. It wasn't coffee too late in the day. It wasn't even finally catching up with sleep, as my heavy lids and baggy eyes told the story the next day. No, for some reason unbeknownst to me, I was wide awake when no critter like me should be. So, I did what any self-respecting insomniac would do. As quietly and delicately as I could muster so as not to wake up the rest of the house, I snuck a bag of chips and ate the whole thing while doomscrolling in the dark.

Do you know what doomscrolling is? You've probably done it, even if you didn't know the name. Doomscrolling is where you just keep reading bad news, no matter how awful it makes you feel, you just keep scrolling through article after article maybe through some sense of obligation or maybe just because you woke up at 1:00 am and need something to do while sneaking a whole bag of chips down your gullet. The problem is, long after the chips were gone, I still sat there, then got tired enough to sorta slump down and lay there, scrolling. Twitter melting down. Political announcements. Rockets flying across borders. One thing after another. It's like, against all my better judgment and experience, I thought if I just scrolled long enough, surely I'd fall into a sleep filled with unicorns and lollipops.

I, of course, did not. I scrolled and scrolled, coming to the end of what was supposed to be the infinite feed, and then I sat there staring at the end of the universe of news and couldn't believe I'd found what I'd found. I'd found the end of all things. Well, not quite so grandiose, I suppose. It was just Reddit, after all. But it felt like I'd accomplished something and was disappointed all at once. I didn't know you could get to the end of Reddit. Now what. Sleep? Go for a walk? Heaven forbid, reflect in silence? No, better to just open another website and see what other horrible news the world had to offer.

Last week, we heard Jesus say the Kingdom of God would come when there is famine, and pestilence, and wars and rumors of wars. It's tempting to look around at Somalia or Covid or Ukraine and tick off the boxes. Must be the Kingdom of God is on its way, 'cause if my doomscrolling is right, we've sure met the requirements. Thing is, there's really never been a period of history since Jesus said those words that we couldn't tick off all those boxes. I don't know how people doomscrolled in 30 AD, but if the prophets are any indication, people found a way. There's always been a way to find the worst news, lay down, and wallow in it. But there might be a different way to look at all that. Say Jesus is right about wars and rumors of wars, about all those tick boxes being indicators of the coming Kingdom of God. Well, if we've always had those indicators, maybe we've also always had the Kingdom. Or, at least, we always have the chance to prepare for that Kingdom. There's something kinda optimistic about that. Sure, doomscrolling can steal your night, but when dawn breaks, God's Kingdom's there. Just there, just out of reach enough to pull us up and out of whatever we'd wallowed in and into hope.

The last Sunday of the church year, that's today, by the way, is Christ the King Sunday. It's a reminder in the calendar that the last word is God's. Christ the King makes us look back at the year behind us and say good riddance to the things we needed to slough off, and Thank God to the things we were blessed to experience. Let me tell you, there are quite a few things I'm glad to slough off, but there's been some real joys this year, too. But it also gives us the chance to look forward. Next week we begin anew. If we had our druthers, what do we want to do, what do we want to be, what do we want to become? And we look both directions at the same time with the lens of God's Kingdom. With Christ our King, what should the world look like, and given that ideal,

what can we do to help it get there? I'll tell ya one thing I need to do. Next time I wake up in the middle of the night, I need to set that glowing screen aside. That's probably a good start. That's not to say that I don't need to know what's going on in the world, but I don't need to be consumed by it either.

We've been talking about Sabbath as a deeply spiritual thing, and it is. But what is spiritual is probably bigger than we think. I know it wasn't great for my sleep schedule to pick up my phone in the wee hours, but it ended up not being great for my soul, either. Where I'd gone to bed happy and content, I woke up grumpy and cynical. You know, Christ the King has an interesting origin. It's one of the newest holidays in the church calendar. It was first celebrated less than a hundred years ago back in 1925. The pope at the time offered it as a way to push against rising nationalism, the growing threat of communism, and, get this, the inherent abuses of capitalism. In all three frameworks, some societal structure upheld some thing as the ultimate ruler in place of God. So, Christ the King Sunday started to remind the world who sits on the throne. Hope in this world, he proposed, doesn't rest in the brutal overthrow of the ruling class seen in the Russian Revolution. It's not in the nation state as the ultimate good seen worldwide, but especially in the post World War I environment on both the winning and losing sides. And it's not in the profit-over-people mindset of the American robber barons. Our hope is in the name of the Lord, and everything else is misplaced.

Now, I suppose it would be easy enough to take that idea and run with it all the way to apathy or indifference. But that's not a terribly faithful way to live into Christ the King. We don't look at the world and wash our hands of its evils. We look at the world, we correct what we've contributed to its evils, and then we try to fix it. It's inherently political because it inherently involves the *polis*, the people we live around and the places we live in. This isn't doomscrolling, it's sorta the opposite. Whatever the Kingdom of God may be in its fullness, we can participate in its arrival all the time, if we choose to. We can choose to look at our structures with a critical eye and weigh what the world is up to against the ideals Christ leads us to. Wars and rumors of wars are just the start. They're the easy ones to see.

One caveat. We've been talking a lot about Sabbath, but this sermon is beginning to sound like a get-off-your-tuckus-and-get-to-work sermon. But I actually want us to consider just the opposite, at least to start. Have you ever heard the phrase, "Don't just do something, stand there?" That's where I'm leaning right now. This is not the year, this is not the time to go crashing in with good intentions and hope for the best. This Sabbath Year, I think, this Sabbath Year is the time for us to take a seat, to get on your tuckus I suppose, and watch and listen and pay attention. This is the year to look critically at our systems, at our priorities, at our ways of doing things. This is the year to pray. And this is the year to imagine what might be different, what we do versus what we could do. And I'm not just talking about the grand global "we." I'm talking about us, here, in this church. Yes, there's gonna be something that demands we act, right then. Of course there will be. But there will also be plenty of things that demand our attention that can wait. And there'll be plenty more that suck us in where we are not most needed. There's plenty of distractions in the doomscroll. But there's plenty of hope in this work.

In this sacred rest, look back. What was sacred? What was holy? What was just plain awful? And today, in those pews, what feels right? What's cozy? What ensures this is a warm place to worry? And tomorrow, what will Christ call us to do, to be, to become? God knows, I'm not hoping for a whole year of insomnia, but next time I wake before the sun, I hope those are the questions that will keep me up at night. Where before doom ruled, maybe then we'll rest in the wonder of Christ the King. Because while doomscrolling can steal our nights, when dawn breaks, God's Kingdom always is there.