



Sermon Title: “Do We Look Out for God?”

22 November 2015: 26th Sunday after Pentecost

Reign of Christ Sunday

FUMC—Arlington, TX 76011

Preaching Text: Psalm 132:1-12

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“He should not vow to walk in the dark, who has not seen the nightfall”

—J. R. R. Tolkien (1892 - 1973) *The Fellowship of the Ring*.

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Today we celebrate the Reign of Christ this last Sabbath of Pentecost and prior to Advent that begins a new Church Year next Sunday. The Reign of Christ Sunday highlights the church’s yearlong worship journey. Today we celebrate the pending reign of Christ. Today we look back at our yearlong journey with Jesus, but we also await the journey’s next stage and hope to experience God’s transforming power.

Hear the lesson for the Reign of Christ Sunday:

- 1 O Lord, remember in David’s favor all the hardships he endured;
- 2 how he swore to the Lord and vowed to the Mighty One of Jacob,
- 3 “I will not enter my house or get into my bed;
- 4 I will not give sleep to my eyes or slumber to my eyelids,
- 5 until I find a place for the Lord, a dwelling place for the Mighty One of Jacob.”
- 6 We heard of it in Ephrathah; we found it in the fields of Jaar.
- 7 “Let us go to his dwelling place; let us worship at his footstool.”
- 8 Rise up, O Lord, and go to your resting place, you and the ark of your might.
- 9 Let your priests be clothed with righteousness, and let your faithful shout for joy.
- 10 For your servant David’s sake do not turn away the face of your anointed one.
- 11 The Lord swore to David a sure oath from which he will not turn back: “One of the sons of your body I will set on your throne.
- 12 If your sons keep my covenant and my decrees that I shall teach them, their sons also, forevermore, shall sit on your throne” (Psalm 132:1-12).

A key vow the Christian steward makes is that everything belongs to God. Because God creates all, God therefore owns all. The Nicene Creed, in affirming our belief in the one God, announces God’s sovereignty. The creed reminds believers that God is “maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.” Our generation may ask: “why creeds?” As United Methodists we are unlike some churches that require affirmation of an exacting list of beliefs as a condition of church membership. Instead, our United Methodist Church is not a creedal church.

So then why do we recite creeds during worship? It is a fair question.

The UM Hymnal contains nine creeds or affirmations of faith. We consider only two of these (Nicene in 325 CE and Apostles') as strictly creeds because ecumenical church councils produced them. The other affirmations we take from Paul's letters (Corinthians, Colossians, Romans, and Timothy) along with affirmations from the United Church of Canada, the Korean Methodist Church, and the UM Social Affirmation.

United Methodists are not required to believe every word of the affirmations. Our spiritual forebear/founder, John Wesley did not agree with a historic (Athanasian) creed, because he disliked its emphasis on condemning people to hell. Affirmations help us come to our own understanding of the Christian faith. They affirm our unity in Christ with those followers who first wrote them—some 1690 years ago (paraphrased from an article by Rev. J. Richard Peck, *Circuit Rider*).

Well back to Reign of Christ. Sovereignty is the order of the day as we celebrate. Worship acknowledges today that Jesus Christ is God's crown prince, our Messiah. The final Sabbath of the Christian year offers a piece of the good news we need not overlook nor take for granted: Jesus, our Sovereign, is God incarnate among us—and "is the ruler yet."

A friend told me of visiting Scotland and seeing two things that delighted him. The first site he visited was the Old Course at St. Andrews, where golf purportedly originated. He also visited St. Giles, the Edinburgh cathedral where John Knox played out his Protestant Reformation role. St. Giles' tower depicts a crown. As people pass by and see the crown, it reminds them that Jesus is the "King of kings;" Jesus is not simply one king among others, but *the* king (see: 1 Timothy 6:15, Revelation 17:14; 19:16).

It is fitting that the Revised Common Lectionary provides readers with Psalm 132 on this Reign of Christ Sunday. For this is a day in which believers measure the past year against Christ's reign in all its future purity. Psalm 132 is a "psalm of ascent," or a "royal psalm." Scholars suggest that Israel chanted this psalm when the community moved the ark of Yahweh

to Jerusalem. The ark for Israel, of course, signified God's presence among them. The ark may have represented the "footstool" upon which Yahweh sat. Psalm 132 is a psalm that enthrones a ruler—or King!

The psalm's opening prayer implores God to not forget David and all he has undergone to "find a place for the Lord, a dwelling place for the Mighty One of Jacob." For Israel, David is plainly the prototype monarch or King. David was brave in battle, shrewd in politics, and an individual that "the Lord has sought out . . . after his own heart" (1 Samuel 13:14). Yet from hindsight a thoughtful person might ask: "Should not David have been a little more concerned about looking after himself and his behavior than worried about a dwelling place for the Lord?" Perhaps?

Yet Psalm 132 provides readers a double-barreled promise. The first pledge comes from David, via the psalmist's lips, that "*I will not give sleep to my eyes . . . until I find a place for the Lord.*" However, a second promise also emerges from verses 11-12. This promise states that "*The Lord swore to David a sure oath from which he will not turn back: 'One of the sons of your body I will set on your throne.'*" Further, the Lord will do this if the sons of David keep covenant with Yahweh. Kings promise to serve the people and likewise the people promise to serve the king. It may not always come to pass, but that is part of the covenant between the ruler and the ruled.

Believers make promises to God and God makes promises to us. This is the nature of covenant faith. Yet faithful stewards also know that while our human promises may be well-intentioned, our promises remain less than reliable. However, the covenantal promises God makes to God's people are always unswerving. In Psalm 132, among other things, we recognize the earnestness of human promise-making to Yahweh. At the same time, we also read about the steady and consistent promise that God makes on our behalf. To become a faithful steward is to rest in the assurance that God's promise to God's people is a promise that not only is reliable, but is also eternal. We serve Christ the king—a king that continuously reminds us we a children of

a holy God. Promises are difficult to illustrate, but here is a story from our nation's history that reveals the risk and reward of promises made and kept.

Ulysses S. Grant was a 4 star general of the union forces during the Civil War and became the 18th President of the United States. John A. Rawlins was Grant's friend and fellow general, who became Grant's chief of staff. During the Civil War, no one was closer to Grant than Rawlins.

Ulysses S. Grant had a drinking problem, but he made a pledge to Rawlins that he would abstain from intoxicating liquors during the war so that he could carry out his duties. On one occasion when Grant broke that promise, Rawlins pleaded with great earnestness that Grant refrain from strong drink, "for his own sake, and the nation's great and holy cause." Rawlins' advice was heeded, and Grant was not impaired by drink when his decision-making was critical.

Promises from a faithful friend can be trusted! There stands today, in front of the Capital in Washington, a magnificent monument to General Grant. He sits upon his horse in characteristic pose and is flanked on either side by stirring battle scenes. At the other end of the mall and a little to the south of Pennsylvania Avenue is Rawlins Park. There stands a very ordinary statue of Grant's friend, John A. Rawlins.

There might be no monument to Grant had there not been the admonition of a faithful friend. It was Rawlins, and his admonition, who kept Grant on his horse (David Owens, Wetzal Road Church of Christ, Liverpool, NY).

God's promises are like this: they keep us mounted and focused on this great gift we call life. We look out for God by being the people God created us to be.