

Waiting for the King

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Revelation 1:4b-8

“Look! He is coming with the clouds...”

Christ the King Sunday

Movement I – Where are We Going?

Are we there yet? This is a persistent, enduring, never-ending question that drives through our outer psyche to our inner thoughts and anxieties. Are we there yet? It is a judging question, it is a question that begs an evaluation and wonders if things are moving in a forward direction. Are we there yet? The question assumes that we are indeed not where we want to be, and we are looking to be somewhere else; it is an existential question of place, of status quo, and of routine. Are we there yet?

If nothing else, the question evokes the thoughts of children in the back of the car, on a hot summer day, three hours into the drive, tired of fidgeting, tired of sleeping, tired of looking out the window and turning to the semi-Buddhist chant, “are we there yet?”

We have all been in this place of wondering and waiting. Sometimes it is to get somewhere. Sometimes it is to reach the next level in your life. You jump through the hoops of pre-college tests, you study hard to get good grades, you wade through application after application, hoping to find that college of your choice, and you can’t wait to get to that other side of actually being in college, to becoming a student. Are we there yet?

Or maybe you are planning a wedding. You choose the church, the minister, the reception hall, the colors, the food, the music, the invitations, the flowers, the photographer, the table favors, the seating, and on and on, and all this is a process to get you to that point where you can finally say you are married. Are we there yet?

It is a place of anxiety, of waiting, and of hoping. It is the place of Vladimir and Estragon in *Waiting for Godot*. It is the feeling James Stewarts feeling, trapped in his apartment in *Rear View Window*, waiting to heal from a broken leg. You know things are going to change, you want things to change, but you are currently waiting for the change to happen. Are we there yet?

The early church was in this place as well. When they received John’s Revelation, they were living as a persecuted community. To be a Christian was, in a sense, to be a dead man walking. People were losing their land, their homes, and their lives because of their faith. Families were torn apart, parents watched their children executed, and believers were under constant watch for someone who might turn them in to the authorities. Yet all this time they looked for the return of Christ. All this time they were waiting for something better, something wonderful, something powerful that would change their lives. They knew something was going to happen. They knew things were going to get better; they just did not yet know how. So they turned to God in prayer as the Romans pounded on their door, as they were brought to trail and asked, “are we there yet?”

Don’t you think that this might be a question we should be asking as well? What are we doing here, but waiting for something to change? What are we doing here but waiting for something better. We are waiting to grow into that church we feel called to become. We are waiting to grow into the Christians we want to become. We are waiting for something to grow and change, because this can’t be it for Christianity. We are asking, “are we there yet,” because this is not where we want to be. We still have work to do as a church; we still have more work to

do as a community of Christians. The purpose of Christianity cannot be simply to gather, worship, and serve. Are we there yet? We know that we are heading somewhere, but where and when? There must be something more, there must be a great promise, and we find ourselves standing next to the early Christians, looking to the sky and asking, “Are we there yet?”

Movement 2 – The Vision of Christ as a Witness

We are headed to a new Kingdom; a new way of life. That is where we are going, it is a vision of where we are going, it is what we are looking forward to. This is why John wrote down his apocalyptic vision of the end, his revelation from God of where they were headed; to give the people a vision of where they were going. The book of Revelation is a vision of where the church is headed and what one will endure before the fullness of the kingdom is achieved. People were asking again and again, are we there yet, and through John, God offered an answer. “No, but this is where you are headed, and this is what it will be like when you get there.” Revelation gives us a vision of a new Kingdom with a new way of life; it describes what the early Christians were hoping for, and what they were looking forward to achieving. A new Kingdom with a new way of life is what we are given as we look to know where it is we are going. In the passage for today, we are given a small sliver of that fuller vision we find in Revelation. In the passage today we are given a taste for the final, for the end for which we yearn and aspire to reach. In this taste, in this small viewing, this intro to the vision of the glorious end, Christ is central; Christ is the benchmark, the guide and the final goal in our faith journey. When we are fully with Christ, individually and as a community, then we will finally be there.

John reminds us that we have Christ as a witness to the new life that we are yearning to live. When we reach this Kingdom, when we enter into this place that God is preparing for all of us, and then we will live in a different way, we will live in God’s way. Christ is the witness to this new way of living. It is a way of living that favors mercy over force. It is a way of living that favors peace over violence. It is a way of living that favors love over hate. It is a way of living that favors honesty over manipulation.

Christ was a witness to this way of life when he sat and ate with sinners. Christ was a witness to this way when he defended the adulterous woman who was about to be stoned. Christ was a witness to this way when he cast the legion of demons out of the man whom society had declared lost. Christ was a witness to this way when he stopped to talk to the woman at the well. Christ was a witness to this way when he reached out and healed the lepers, when he called the children to come to him, when he invited himself to Zacchaeus’ home for dinner, when he showed no fear in the face of a storm, and when raised Lazarus from the dead. Christ was a witness to this way when he spoke the truth to the power of the Pharisees, spoke truth to the selfishness of the Sadducees, and when he spoke truth to the regal claims of the Romans. Christ was a witness to this way when he gave himself up to the authorities, when he allowed himself to be nailed to the cross and to die on Calvary. Christ was a witness to the way of living that will be lived by all in the Kingdom of God.

Christ was showing us a new way of speaking, a new way of acting, and a new way of understanding each other. In the book *Stranger in a Strange Land*, a human who was raised by Martians comes to earth and shows everyone on earth a new way of living, of thinking and of speaking. He opens up people’s lives and gives them hope in their life. He offers a new way of living. In the same way, Christ comes to us from the Heavenly Kingdom, and is a witness to us of this new way of living.

This is what we aspire to – a way of life that does not have to be suspicious, that does not look to overpower, that does not have to control, but just looks to live with mercy and peace. In this world we will be rejected if we follow the life of Christ. Think of the martyrs as an example. The word martyr means, “Witness.” In this world, a martyr is someone who is a true witness to the Kingdom of God, even if they lose their life. We follow the path of people like Martin Luther King, like Oscar Romero, like Perpetua and Felicity, the very first martyrs, who lived as true as possible to the witness of Christ. When we get there, when we are fully in the Kingdom of God, churches will no longer argue, Christians will no longer fall into distrust and disdain, but we will all be able to live into the witness that Christ leaves for all of us. We are headed into a new Kingdom with a new way of life. It will be a new and blessed experience, and Christ is the witness for the way we will live.

Movement 3 – The Vision of Christ as the Firstborn of the Dead

We are headed to a life that overcomes even death! This is a way of courage and of hope. Look to Christ again for this hope! Christ is not only a witness to a new way of life, but to a life that overcomes death itself! The scripture claims that Christ is the firstborn of the dead. Christ is the first one who fully overcame death, who claims victory over death, and who offers a true and full life that we can live. This is what we are headed for, a life that no longer fears, a life that is eternal and that is full of bliss. The glory is that we are offered this life now! There may be times when we are fearful to live the life that we want to live. There may be times when we are hesitant to take the chances that we want to take. There may be times when we want to hold back for our own safety, our own security. After all, do we want to go to the cross and die with Christ? Do we want to take that kind of chance? We can take that chance, because Christ is showing us that we have nothing to lose. Christ offers us life that transcends death. The way of Christ is the way of life that walks through death. It is the way of the light that shines through the darkness. It is the sound that breaks through the silence. The early Christians saw this hope and lived into this hope with their own witness. They stood up to power as Christ stood up to power. They were executed as Christ was executed, but they died singing praises to God knowing that Christ paved a way for them through death to a full, eternal life. Death is stayed, you have nothing to lose, and you can live the life that you are called to live.

In conversations I have with other clergy we often talk about what holds back churches in growth. Again and again, I hear that churches are held back by a fear of death. It is a fear of failure, a fear of losing everything that often keeps churches from moving forward. Yet when churches let go of that fear, and trust in Christ, then they truly live. When churches take the chance of dying and trust in God, then full life is achieved. We have to be ready to die with Christ to truly live. We put on the armor of this truth and this hope that we are headed to a place where death is no more through the actions of our Lord, Jesus Christ. We are headed to a life that goes beyond death.

Movement 4 – The Vision of Christ as Ruler of All

We are headed to a time when Christ is the King! It is a moment when we recognize that Christ is the king of us all. Christ is the king of all kings, the ruler of all. This is where we are headed to, a time and a place where we do not have to follow anyone but Christ. It is a time when we need not claim allegiance to anyone but Christ. We are looking to a hope that we do not need to vote for the lesser of two evils, where we need not rely upon a system that is corrupt, but where we can rest entirely on Christ. For the early Christians, John, was telling them that Christ

was a king beyond the Caesars, that Christ offered a system that one could trust. Think about the movie, *The Lion King*. Mufasa was dead, Simba ran off, and Scar ran Pride Rock. Yet there were still animals who held their allegiance to Mufasa and Simba, and did not follow the ideal of teaching of Scar. The claimed their allegiance only to the true king.

The early Anabaptists, people from whom we derive our roots, followed this vision and hope to an extreme place, and would not make oaths, or follow any leader but Christ. It may seem extreme, but isn't that where we are headed as a church and as a people? Isn't that why we, as Baptists, will not allow anyone to rule over us as a church? We do not have a bishop, we do not have a pope, we do not have a district superintendent, or a presbytery, or a session. All we have is each other as a community, looking to be led by Christ, looking to be guided by the Holy Spirit. This is where we are going, where no one is over anyone else, because we are all following Christ as the ruler of all. Like someone once said, at the foot of the cross the ground is level. As Baptist, we especially aspire to make Christ the king of our lives and of our faith community. The theologian, Stanley Hauerwas, claims that we are to put ourselves aside from the world as a separate and different community. The world has rulers that we need not follow. Politicians, tyrants, commercial lure, power, corruption, desire, and greed all rule the world. But Christ will break these, Christ will end these and Christ will bring his kingdom upon us all. We are called to live a life with Christ as the ruler and the king of all that we do.

Movement 5 – Christ Elects us to Join Him

Are we there yet? We have been given the example of Christ as the witness of the new life. We have been given the hope of Christ as the firstborn of the dead; that life has overcome death. We have been given the focus of Christ as the true King over all of our lives. We are waiting to fully experience this kingdom, hoping that we will be able to live into this kingdom. Are we there yet?

Christ has turned to us, and has elected us to join him. The book of Revelation, this passage in particular, reminds us that Christ has made us all, already priests of the kingdom. The scripture reminds us that Christ has made us all, already a part of the heavenly kingdom. We have a spot; we have a place in this heavenly kingdom where we are headed. We don't have to rush to make sure we get first in line, because we are on the 'a' list of the invitations, the invitation is already in our hands, and Christ has called us to be there, at his side, with him when the kingdom is brought to its fullness. Christ has a place for us at his table and has made us ready to sit with him. Are we there yet? In a way we are already there. When we share the love of Christ, when we show mercy, when we live with compassion, when we try to do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with our God, then we are there in the presence and in the midst of the heavenly kingdom. We are already in Christ's presence, we are already following the example of Christ when we love each other, show kindness to each other and care for each other.

When we take a chance in our life for the sake of Christ, when we stand up and put our well being on the line, when we follow Christ boldly without fear we are there in the presence of the heavenly kingdom. When we realize that life lived in the example of Christ is the fullness of life that can be lived. When we say no to the life and death of the world and yes to the life and salvation of Christ, then we are there in the presence of the heavenly kingdom. We have been given that life, we have been called to that glory where we need not fear death, we are already living the full life.

When we turn to the cross, and let the cross lead us in life, then we are there. When we turn to Christ as the final leader and ruler of our life, then we are there. When we turn from the

temptations of the world, when we resist the calls and the lures of society for the sake of Christ, then we are there. When we, as a church, can claim our allegiance to Christ, and only to Christ, then we are there in the presence and the kingdom of God.

Yet, realistically, there are times when we do not live the life that Christ was a witness for us to live. There are times when we argue and criticize in this church. There are times when we are blinded to the will of God. There are times when we become selfish, when we become lazy, when we become greedy, when we become judgmental. There are times when do not live as Christ has called us to live.

There are times when we become afraid. There are times when we turn to prudence over boldness. There are times when we fear death more than we want life and we do not live into the life that Christ has called us to live.

There are times when we follow the ways of the world. There are times when we let other people rule us rather than following the rule of Christ. There are times when we let the values, the ideals and the directives of the world guide our thoughts and our actions, and we do not follow Christ as we are call to follow.

We are still broken. We still sin. Yet let me call you to again look at your invitation. Let me call you to again look at the list of people invited to be a part of the kingdom. Christ still calls you, Christ still wants you, and Christ cleans you to make you ready again to be a part of the Kingdom of God. Even though, yesterday we were less than a witness, today we can reclaim that call and be a witness. Even though yesterday you were scared, today you can be bold. Even though yesterday you caved to the world, today you can again stand up and follow Christ. You are forgiven; you are blessed to sit at Christ's side at the heavenly table no matter what you have done. Reclaim your place at Christ's side. Sit at the table; enter into the Kingdom of God. Here and now, you can still be in that place we all long to be – the Kingdom of God.

Movement 6 – The Great Return

As we strive, as we are challenged, as we try to live into the people we are called to be, always look for Christ. Look to the clouds for the return of Christ. Do you want to know if we are there yet? There will be moments, when we will feel like we are there, amongst the angles and the saints, in the presence of Christ. There will be moments when we will feel like we are miles away. There will be moments when we feel heavy and burdened. But keep look to the cross, keep walking with Christ all the way, and we will get there. We will get to the point when it will no longer feel difficult to follow the ethic of love. We will get to the point when it will no longer feel like a burden to live the life of Christ. But keep the faith that we will get to the point when tears will fall no more, when pain will be no more, when death will be no more. We will get to the point when all knees will bow and bend and declare that Christ is indeed the King. That is where we are headed, and we will get there.

We need to work to get there. We need to strive to become the people we are called to be, we need the strive to share and experience this Kingdom of God that we all want to live in and experience, but we need to remember that we will not make it happen. It will be Christ, coming out of the clouds, coming to walk again with us, that will bring us to that place of glory. It will be Christ, coming into our lives, calling us as a church, calling us by name that will bring us to that place of glory. It will be Christ who brings us there. We need to rest upon Christ. We need to follow Christ, and we need to trust that in the proper time, we will be there.

AMEN