

Text: Revelation 1:4b- 8; John 18:33-37

Title: Double Vision – Theme- we know the earthly Jesus but we worship the Risen Lord

Date: November 22, 2009

Today is Christ the King Sunday and the last Sunday on the liturgical calendar. For many, if not all of us, that is almost a meaningless statement. So what? Christ the King- is that a surprise to anyone? Liturgical calendar- boy that even sounds obsolete and archaic! And if we fail to use it- it IS obsolete and archaic. The Liturgical Calendar is a holdover from a time when most people could not read. How does one teach the faith? We Protestants are incredibly indebted to the Printing press which made books cheap and widely available, sometimes it is hard for us to imagine a world where one has to act out the story in order to teach it- and that is exactly what the Liturgical Calendar is. We start with Advent, recalling the promises of a Messiah, go through the Birth, the baptism and ministry of Jesus, Easter, Pentecost- all leading to the climax- the recognition that Jesus is indeed not just the wandering rabbi of Nazareth but the transcendent Lord of the Universe! I've got to start with the point, because quite frankly , I am not sure when that Timer is going to go off.

So we start with Revelation- what you have to understand about Revelation is that it is apocalyptic literature- it is not prophecy as we understand it. Prophecy is someone speaking the words of the Lord to a particular people in a particular situation. Apocalyptic literature on the other hand is a series of images designed to rip away the veil of what we expect to see in order to demonstrate the transcendent reality that is not limited by our perceptions. The only other book in the Bible that fits into that category would be Daniel! We are used to thinking of Jesus as the Carpenter, God made flesh, who walked with his disciples, who fed the poor and healed the sick, who confounded the religious and political authorities and who was executed for his trouble. We think of Easter and the post resurrection appearances. And while John, who writes Revelation would say , yeah that's the guy I'm talking about – but look at who he really is?! The vision of Jesus on the mount of transfiguration doesn't begin to do him Justice!

So John starts, just like so many of the NT letters do, with a greeting. *Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come...* We tend to just

skip over that part. Sure it has a nice cadence, and it rolls off the tongue, but who cares? John does, for in his “who is and who was and who is to come” is a word play on God’s name. **Yahweh** is a form of the verb “to be” it can be translated as “He who causes and continues to cause all things to exist” or “He who is the basis of all existence and holds all existence.” The OT tries to get at that with I AM THAT I AM- HE WHO IS AND WHO WAS AND IS TO BE” is John’s take ; and it is not a bad one. It makes you want to put it into a hymn, doesn’t it?

That this is God is underscored by the 7 spirits, who are before the throne, this is imagery from both the OT and the intertestament literature we call the Apocrypha. We are also greeted by Jesus Christ , who wouldn’t lie to us, who is the first one to be resurrected and who is above all the kings of the earth.

Revelation was written and circulated during the first empire wide persecution under Nero. This was not passive discrimination- that had been going on for some time. This was active hostility on behalf of the State. Nero was nuts- he would later be murdered by his own bodyguard- but he was evil and cruel as well. We have reports of him burning Christians alive as human torches to light his gardens. Historians writing in his day point out that he torched Rome so that he could rebuild the city in his image- and he blamed the disaster on the Christian community, feeding them to the press as scapegoats. John wanted his readers to know that no matter how bad it got- our Jesus is ultimately superior to Nero and all the other kings of the earth.

Look at how both Daniel and Revelation describe Jesus : *5 I looked up and saw a man clothed in linen, with a belt of gold from Uphaz around his waist. 6 His body was like beryl, his face like lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and the sound of his words like the roar of a multitude.*

Daniel 10: 5-6

13 and in the midst of the lampstands I saw one like the Son of Man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash across his chest. 14 His head and his hair were white as white wool, white as snow; his eyes were like a flame of fire, 15 his feet were like burnished bronze, refined as in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of many waters. 16 In his right hand he held seven stars, and from his mouth came a sharp, two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining with full force. Revelation 1: 13-15

What John in Revelations wants us to understand that Christ the King, the Jesus we know and love, is the pre-existent Second Person of the Trinity. Jesus was not a man who had God's favor and was after the fact exalted and given authority over heaven and earth the way so many pagan stores go. We worship the One who both Daniel and John tried to give us a sense of, that God so far beyond our ability to comprehend, let alone describe. This God chose to put all those trappings aside and enter our world in the person of Jesus Christ so that He could pay the price of our sins by his blood; so that we may experience forgiveness and community and mutual ministry. And what is even more mind boggling is that the motive for doing all of this is that this Pre Existent One loves us! John caught the essential wonder of the Gospel- no wonder he had to go with the over the top imagery of apocalyptic literature!

This is the Jesus to whom every knee shall bow and every tongue proclaim as Lord. This is the Jesus who will come in the clouds trumpeting the end of our world and the beginning of a new heaven on earth. This is the Jesus who will stand as Judge over all humanity- the great and the small.

Gee- after all that – describing Him as the beginning and the end, the Alpha and Omega seems sort of lame, doesn't it? Yet this is just another way to get at the meaning of Yahweh's name. Jesus is God, God is Jesus and together with the Holy Spirit they are the Almighty. This is what we declare on Christ the King Sunday

No wonder Pilate braces Jesus on whether Jesus is the King of the Jews. There is an ancient tradition that says that Pilate was trying to get out of crucifying Jesus; that his wife had had a dream warning him not to have anything to do with this Jesus guy. It's just a story, but it helps us to understand Pilate trying to get out from the rock and the hard place that he has found himself in. On one hand you have the Herodians, the puppet Kings that the Romans used, on another side he had the religious leadership who were crying for Jesus' blood. He needed them to stave off the rebellion that was always simmering just under the surface here in Palestine. And finally, he represented Rome, who would not tolerate another claim to the throne- any throne. So he asks Jesus if he is a king.

Now if Jesus had just said, look your honor, I'm just a carpenter turned rabbi who was in the wrong place at the wrong time, then Pilate would be off the hook. Sure, he

could make sure Jesus was scolded and tortured, but not crucified. At the back of his mind he had to wonder what would happen if Jesus' followers wanted to incite rebellion? But Jesus doesn't give him an out. My Kingdom is not of this World. And given what we have read in both Daniel and Revelation – boy is he telling the truth!

So we come to the end of the Liturgical year proclaiming that Jesus is the Preexistent Lord and Giver of Life, the King of All and the Holder of our Future.... Let us stand and recite the Nicene Creed....