

Consecration Sunday
November 21, 2021

Our Savior's Way Lutheran Church

Pastor Don Schaefer

Revelation 1:4b-8

John's extended greeting to 1st century Christians uses a lot of words wrapped around great imagery. If we were to offer the Readers Digest version of this text, it would be simply this; "Christ the King" because that is the title given to this day. We have been to the crib and the cross. Today is the last Sunday of the church year, the exclamation point! *"Christ the King!"*

If we call Christ OUR king, that demands allegiance and response with our whole life; no subtle separation between what we say on Sunday and what we do on Monday. Being a loyal subject of Christ calls for a mindset with Christ at the center, involving more giving than getting, more letting go instead of holding on, and forgiving more than getting even - all driven by a grateful heart!

This is as much a challenge in our day as it was to those who first read John's words. He was writing them to encourage faith in a group of people who were a distinct minority in their society. The Roman empire was controlled by power and wealth. There

were many opinions about who or what God was so the claims that Christians made seemed foolish or wishful thinking at best.

Today, 80% or more of Americans have walked away from the Christian church and the faith it declares. They have left for lots of different reasons, but the reality is that we who are still here are a distinct minority. Beyond these doors, there are many opinions about who God is or even if there is a God. Our society, like that of the Roman empire, is still driven by power, wealth, and control. There is no support for living by Christian faith from outside of here.

The challenge to living with a grateful heart comes from what is the context of life outside of us but also comes from inside of us. Things happen and people do things that leave us wounded. We don't talk about those things very much but at 3:00 am in the morning, we stare through the gray shadows in our bedroom wondering why things have happened, asking God quietly "*why?*"

We have good intentions to live our faith with a grateful heart, but it is difficult. Do you know people who have managed to do it? I do. One of them was Ola Conard, a 75-year-old widow living in Appalachia. One summer, I was part of a group

working to bring running water into her home; a luxury she never had before. She spoke about how harsh life in Appalachia was but with no bitterness. She didn't know what a Lutheran was, but she knew who Jesus was. She was so sure of His love for her. Her faith was her strength and she lived with a grateful heart. Her faith embarrassed mine because while I intellectually knew what the gospel said, it hadn't penetrated my life or my heart.

I learned from Ola Conard what life shaped by gratitude looks like. I also learned that a grateful heart has to come from beyond good intentions and obligations. The gospel is the motivation. Listen again to Paul's words in Romans 8; ***"I am sure that neither death nor life, angels or principalities, things present or things to come, nor height...can separate us from God's love."*** God knows us cold. Every one of our words, thoughts, and actions; even the ones we deny, rationalize or would like to forget. Yet out of infinite mercy, God knowing full well who we are, claims us in love and nothing can change that.

When the reality of what the gospel really means for our living and our dying sinks into our hearts, things change. We see ourselves in a different way. The critical voices yelling from the bathroom mirror

listing out all of our faults and weaknesses are overcome by the voice of God calling us beloved.

When we look at people around us, before we see the size of the wallet, color of the skin, where they live, how they dress, we see them as someone for whom Jesus died. When we look at the unique self who God has made us to be, we recognize that what we have is meant to be shared in love with the world.

We are living in a restless moment surrounded more by opinion and judgment than wisdom and compassion. Just as it was in the first century, we Christians are called to live the faith we profess. Not in big dramatic ways but more in the everyday ordinary of how we go at life, how we look at ourselves and others, what we do with the things God has freely blessed us with. Today you make a commitment of support for this ministry. Whatever you commit to is between you and God. I encourage you to be driven by gratitude, not an obligation because Christ is The King. Because Christ is your King. Let the people of God say "Amen".

+ Deo Gracias +