

**“Thanksgiving without limits!”**  
**2 Samuel 23:1-7   Revelation 1:4b-8   John 18:33-38**

Most children at some time or other in their childhoods get frustrated with their families to the point that they decide to run away. Earlier this year my brother and I were reminiscing about a time when we had spent several weeks devising our strategy and making plans for our get away.

At the time we were living in New Hampshire on the Piscatawa River which was quite wide at that point, but on the distant shore we could see some very inviting woods that looked like they would be full of adventures. We decided that we were up for it! The neighbors had a row boat tied up to their dock, so that was going to be our vehicle for escape. We stashed away several boxes of graham crackers and a couple jars of peanut butter. That was our provisions.

When the designated night came we got into our pajamas and said our good night prayers with our father and mother and dutifully kissed them goodnight, but the plan was that we would only pretend to go to sleep and after they had gone to bed we would quietly get up, get dressed, gather our provisions, and make our get away.

So we quietly waited and waited and waited, whispering back and forth from the top to the bottom bunk. We wanted to be sure that they had gone to sleep before we set our plan in motion. The next thing we knew .... It was time to get up, get dressed and go to school. Oh Well ...

I was reading an article about how to deal with children that threaten to run away. There has been a progression of ideas on how to deal with children that make these threats when they get frustrated. There has been one school of thought that recommends acknowledging the frustration and then logically discussing all the logistics about where they would go and how they would live, hopefully leading to dissuading them.

But there is also another school of thought with a different strategy. This plan recommends that when children threaten to run away that parents and caregivers simply say “No,” explaining that they may not run away because “we belong to one another” and when persons belong to one another, even when they are frustrated and upset, they stay with one another.

I thought of that when praying about this conversation between Jesus and Pilate. I think “belonging” is at the heart of what Jesus is talking about. A desire for a sense of belonging is a deeply relational impulse. Pilate is trying to determine if Jesus is claiming to be the king of the Jewish nation, but Jesus responds by asking questions of Pilate, and it is clear what Pilate understands a king to be is very different than Jesus understanding. Pilate, like most of us, is thinking in

terms of authority in the sense of being in control and exercising power, but that is not Jesus' vision of the kingdom of God.

“Belonging” is an intensely relational dynamic. It is a deep spiritual yearning within each one of us, and yet we often fear to go deep into that reality. When Pilate asks Jesus if he is the king of the Jews, Jesus responds by asking Pilate why he is asking this of him. In other words, Jesus is saying, “Are you asking me this because you were appointed by Caesar to try to keep order here? Are you asking me this because you are trying to keep some peace between these squabbling factions? OR, are you asking me this as one human being to another? At what level do you want to engage here? Do you want to be safe or are you willing to take the risk to be deeply human here?”

Pilate won't go there. He stays on the surface.

We live in a time when paradigm shifts seem to be coming faster and faster. A paradigm is the way we see and experience reality. We are surrounded by examples of paradigm shifts, for example the way we listen to music. Drive down to Fort Myers and you can tour Thomas Edison's home and hear and see how he invented the gramophone that led to the record player. In our lifetime that has shifted to eight track tapes to cassettes to CD's and it won't be long before they are also a thing of the past as we shift to I-Pods and computers entirely. When the Bible was written people thought the entire cosmos was just a big bubble with the earth below, the heaven above and the whole thing was engulfed by the waters of the firmament. Then some observant people decided that the earth was round. The church didn't like that idea, but eventually we got our heads wrapped around that, then Galileo came along and was audacious enough to say that the earth revolved around the sun rather than the other way around. That was considered heresy by the church. A few hundred years later a fellow named Charles Darwin observed that all of life was connected and proposed a theory called evolution. Some Christians are still having trouble with that one – we don't have trouble enjoying the scientific developments that have come from that advancement in our understanding. We take our antibiotics; we go for our MRI's but still have trouble letting go of old comfort zones long enough to allow our faith to develop to see God's compassionate work in all of creation.

Paradigm shifts are not easy for us. It was not easy for Pilate. It is not easy for us. Why should Pilate have been able to recognize this itinerate, homeless rabbi as a king? He had no power. He deserved no pomp or circumstance. Pacify the crowd.

So what kind of king do we worship anyhow? This is the last Sunday in the church year, and it is observed as Christ the King Sunday. On this last Sunday of the year we declare that Jesus Christ is king. In Jesus Christ is to be found the goal of all human history, the joy of all who hear, and the fulfillment of our

deepest aspirations. I would name that as the need to love and be loved; the need to belong.

That promise of belonging is both timely for us and for all time as well. Every human, earthly kingship has a beginning and end. The passage about King David is from the end of his reign but in Revelation Jesus Christ is described as “him who is and who was and who is to come.” The “belonging” promised by Jesus Christ is for all time and for eternity.

On this Thanksgiving Sunday that is worth giving thanks for. It is a thanksgiving without limits! When we focus on Christ our king, we see the three tenses of Thanksgiving: the past, the present, and the future. The kingdom we seek has been, is, and will be to come.

In the first tense We worship as witnesses to how the love and mercy and forgiveness of Jesus Christ has been real in our lives in the past. I love listening to my elders witness to how God has been real in their lives. Many of you have shared some of your stories with me. They are each a vital and important witness. The longer I serve as your Pastor the more of your stories I hear and they always bring me great encouragement. When we share our witness the Holy Spirit will use that.

But it is also important to remember that when we witness to how Christ has been active in the past, it does not mean that we worship the past. The Lordship of Jesus Christ is not an exercise in nostalgia. On Thanksgiving we often give thanks for the pilgrims that came to this land seeking religious freedom but the reality is that much of the time they were only willing to give that freedom to those who belonged to their church and believed like they did. The founding fathers of our nation fought for the right to vote, but not for everybody, only if you were white, male, and owned property. Witness to how Christ has been real in our lives in our past is no excuse for false pride or smugness. God always desires to lead us forward. That is a reminder of our ongoing need for humility and willingness to grow.

No one of us is self-made. When Jesus said, “I am Alpha” he is saying that all our beginnings are in him. None of us ever outgrows our need for humility.

Two psychiatrists met at a convention. One asked the other, “What was the most difficult case you ever had?” The second answered, “I had this patient who lived in a fantasy world. He wouldn’t work; he wouldn’t take any responsibility. He insisted that he had a rich uncle in South America who would soon die and leave him a fortune. Every day he waited for a letter from his attorney. I treated him with reality therapy three times a week for eight years.” The first psychiatrist asked him, “Did you cure him?” The reply was, “Well, yes and no. Just as I was just beginning to make a little progress, that stupid letter came!” We never outgrow our need for humility.

In the second tense we give thanks that Jesus Christ is our reality today. Too much of the time we tend to be like Pilate and want to either verbally spar with Jesus or else just ignore his Lordship. "What kind of king are you after all? And by the way, what is truth anyway? No one believes in that kind of thing any longer." So through our hardness of heart the witness is not heard. The only way to see the kingdom at work today is for Jesus to be our king today. What Pilate saw made no sense because he was not willing to be in relationship with this kingdom of belonging.

The challenge of the kingdom is the same for each of us today – to let God be God in you today – to let God be God in our church today – to let God be God in your family, in your job, in your neighborhood, in your world today. Now is the day of salvation. In the gospels the witness is that it was on the cross that Jesus reign began in all its compassion. It may have seemed that worldliness and violence, selfishness and power won the day, but anyone who can accept that vision of the cross is reigning with Christ in the kingdom right now. Jesus said to one of the thieves hanging with him, "You are in paradise right now, even in the middle of your sufferings."

If you are struggling with Thanksgiving this year, hear this, you belong to the King, he claims you as his own today. Jesus promise is to be with us all through our life, in all our days and all our ways, he will be present. That is the gift of a king.

Our thanksgiving is also in the future tense for the promise of his reign is for all of our tomorrows. Christ will come again in glory, in a full revealing of his true character. I heard a story about a king who had no son, and he had a longing for an heir who would succeed him on his throne. He was an unconventional king so he decided to post a notice inviting young men to apply to be considered for adoption into his family, and to become his heir. He ran an ad in the newspaper; he even put it on Craig's List.

All that he asked was that they should love God and love their neighbor. A poor peasant boy saw the notice, but he thought that he would have no chance of being selected because of the ragged clothes that he wore. But he was very industriousness and worked very hard until he had just enough money to go to Dillard's and buy a brand new suit (they were having a sale because they were going out of business). Wearing his new clothes he set off to the palace, determined to apply for the position of the king's adopted son.

As he was headed down to the king's palace down in Sarasota he encountered a very poor old beggar, and the boy just couldn't help himself. He felt sorry for the guy so he exchanged clothes with him and the boy found himself back to wearing beggar clothes only these were worse than before. It hardly seemed worth it to even go on toward the king's palace. "What was I thinking of?" the boy said to

himself, but he was already most of the way there so he kept on travelling. At least he could catch a glimpse of the grand palace.

When the boy arrived, all the guards were really amused by his appearance. But their scornful laughter just made the boy that much more persistent so after standing in line a long, long time the boy was finally admitted into the presence of the king.

The inside of the palace was dazzling but when the boy saw the king, at first he couldn't put his finger on it but he looked familiar. As he got closer he realized that the king was wearing the exact same clothes that he had given the beggar just a few hours before.

When the king saw the boy a big grin came across his face, and he came down from his throne and embraced the boy, holding him close in his arms. "At last you are home," he whispered, "Welcome, my son."

That is the gospel for Christ the King Sunday.

You belong to Christ today.

All of your yesterdays belong to Christ.

All of your tomorrows belong to Christ.

That is Thanksgiving without limits!

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First United Methodist Church of Palmetto

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