



Sunday November 26, 2023  
Psalm 97:1-7 (Christ the King Sunday)

Ascension Lutheran Church  
Pastor Tony Acompañado

It's that time of year again and it's a little hard to believe that it's come so quickly. Thanksgiving has come and gone and from here on we're pretty much just looking ahead to Christmas. But before we rush ahead, I think it would be good for us to pause a moment – because we still have *this* Sunday – a day often overlooked amid the hustle and bustle of the Christmas season – a day that reminds us *why* Christmas should be important to us in the first place.

We've reached the very last Sunday of the church year, and we could even say that today is kind of like New Year's Eve in the church. Today we celebrate Christ as King, and we take time to reflect on our place in the coming reign of God. We look back and reflect on our journey of faith up to this point, not so we can feel ashamed, but so we don't repeat the things we need to leave behind.

At times I feel like the Christmas season is a bit like New Year's Eve – we eat a lot of food, spend more money than we probably should, and fill our schedules with as much merrymaking as possible. And then, just as a new year begins the feelings of guilt take over and we make resolutions to exercise more, be better with our money, stress out a little less often, spend our time more wisely, and eat more vegetables. We justify our unhealthy habits, and then we promise to do better in the future.

And every year about this time, pastors are tempted to focus on condemning the materialism, consumerism, and greed that can overwhelm this time of year. And while I certainly understand why, I think our Scripture for today paints a very different picture for where our attention *should* be focused.

Unlike December 31 when we find ourselves feeling guilty about the ways we messed up last year's resolutions, the Psalm we heard earlier invites us to remember the ways God welcomes us in and includes us in God's ever-unfolding reign, even though we don't get it right all the time. So, even if we're living with regret over our lack of faithfulness, that's not at all where the Psalm begins.

*“O come, let us sing to the Lord; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!”*

Psalm 95 begins with an invitation to come and sing to the Lord, to make a joyful noise. The word in Hebrew for “make a joyful noise” means “to shout” or “make a loud noise.” And we are invited to enter into God's presence with loud and joyful shouts of praise. We are invited to praise God because God is our Savior. The verses throughout Psalm 95 list fitting reasons for praising God – the Lord is a great God, a King above all gods. Our God made the depths of the earth and the highest mountains, the seas and the dry land.

But I want you to notice that before *anything we do* - before we've had the chance to confess, repent, or try to make ourselves worthy – God invites us to worship.

God is calling out to us on this last Sunday of the church year to worship, to sing *loud* songs of praise, and to remember God's mighty acts throughout history. You and I are invited to praise God for the ways God has saved and sustained us. We're invited to end this year in the church with praise and thanksgiving for all the ways God has remained faithful, even when *we* were anything but. We are invited to give God our praise, and worship God our Savior and King.

And then, just in case we missed it the first time, we are invited a second time! The first invitation is to worship, and the second invitation gets more specific, *“O come, let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker!”* We are called to worship God through loud shouts of praise and humble ourselves by kneeling and bowing down before our King, our Lord, our Maker.

Just like the first invitation, the second invitation gives reasons why we should kneel and bow down – he is our God, and we are God's people. Today, as we're on the cusp of a new church year, we are invited to come and worship – to come and humble ourselves before our God and King. And, in so doing, we are invited to become more like the One we worship.



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Notice how God's grace, love, and mercy come first, *and then*, our life change comes as a response in gratitude. Notice also that God's call to us doesn't begin with a list of dos and don'ts. It doesn't begin with a lengthy list of requirements or things we need to do in order to make the cut or reach a desired standard. There isn't a ranking system of faithfulness that we need to measure ourselves against. It all begins with God's call to us – a call into worship, a call into a community, a call into a life of being continually shaped into the image of the King we serve.

And it all begins with God's invitation, by God's grace, in God's call to us – *and then*, as we worship God, we are transformed. I think God invites us twice, so we won't miss it. We're called to worship, called to humility, and called to participate in representing God and God's kingdom to the rest of the world.

So, maybe on *this* Christ the King Sunday then, we can make some new resolutions together. But not like the ones we make every year with no real intention of keeping, instead let's make ones that flow out of our thankfulness for who God is and all that God has done.

The King of the universe has invited us to come and worship, to be part of a new community, and this invitation is one that is sure to transform us. Afterall, this is what the Gospel is all about – being invited in by the grace and love of Jesus *before* we've ever done anything to earn it, and then being sent out to live transformed lives that change the world around us. This is the reality of the lives we're called to live as followers of Jesus.

And if we believe these things – if we believe that God claims us as his beloved children, then how will we live in response? Perhaps a better question is, what do we think the reign of God would look like? And what is our role in representing God's kingdom on earth? Does it look like sharing what we have with others? Does it look like no one being hungry? Does it look like ALL of God's children receiving love and belonging? Does the reign of God include patience in the long lines at the grocery store, honesty in our business affairs, and forgiveness in our relationships?

My friends, we can't miss that this morning. Our response and our life are our acts of gratitude as part of the new family that God has welcomed us into. The way we live isn't something we do to gain God's approval; the way we live is just part of who we are as we're being transformed by God's love and mercy.

So, as you look back at this past year, and you think about the way your life reflects the kingdom of God and the reign of Christ, what resolutions might you want to make for the upcoming year? What might God be calling you to do as you shine the light of Christ into *this* community and to the rest of the world?

Whatever it is, I simply pray that every moment of your life will always and forever shout joyful praise and thanks to our God and King. Thanks be to God! Amen.