This week we gathered among friends and family to celebrate Thanksgiving. We paused from our busy lives to offer thanks and recount God’s blessings upon us. Keep in mind though that in the midst of our festive feast and celebration, there are those who are thankful to be alive as they grieve for the loss of their loved ones or their home. Just the other night on Thanksgiving Eve, one of my friend’s church (the Woodbury Union Presbyterian Church) in Warwick, Rhode Island caught a 2-alarm fire. Thankfully no one was inside the building at the time and no one was injured. Normally they would’ve had their boy scout meeting on Wednesday nights. But because of Thanksgiving, it was canceled. Properties can be replaced but lives cannot. Many do have much to remember and give thanks for, in spite of our many challenges that we might face in life. Kind of put this season of giving thanks to God and to others into perspective.

Come to think of it, the concept of thanksgiving is nothing new. As I mentioned last week, the practice of giving thanks to God dated all the way back to the days of Genesis when God asked the two sons of Adam and Eve (Cain and Abel) to present their thanksgiving offerings. God accepted Abel’s offering but rejected Cain’s because Cain did not offer his best from his heart. Cain did not present his offering with the right attitude. Cain only brought “whatever” (the leftovers) he gathered with a few nuts and vegetable, when God deserves our best. That was the very first Thanksgiving!

For many Christians, giving thanks to God and worshipping God shall become synonymous and inseparable. **Thanksgiving invites us to reflect upon who w­e are, who we ultimately belong to, under the sovereignty of God?**

As the Psalmist declared in Psalm 100 that,

***We shall make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth.***

***We shall worship the LORD with gladness;***

***come into his presence with singing.***

***We know that the LORD is God.***

***It is he that made us, and we are his;***

***we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.***

***We will enter his gates with thanksgiving,***

***and his courts with praise.***

***Give thanks to him, bless his name.***

***For the LORD is good; his steadfast love endures forever,***

***and his faithfulness to all generations.***

Incidentally our texts this week also invite us to put on our spiritual lens of Thanksgiving, on this last Sunday of our liturgical season, which is also known as Christ the King Sunday. We declare that Christ is not only the beginning but also the end, our Alpha and our Omega (…and all that in between).

We acknowledge that **everything that we have comes from God and that we belong to God.** We did not bring anything into this earth and likewise we cannot take anything with us either whenever God decides to call us home. God has established this covenant with humanity. We don’t even need to make our requests, because God already knows and God has already provided.

As evident in the world that we live in these days, it’s not easy to find peace in our hearts and reclaim God’s sovereignty in this world. We find ourselves being drawn into a whirlwind of helplessness or even apathy where we may examine ourselves (or even question) God’s allegiance and fidelity upon humanity. Some may even ask, does God even care? How could any of these be happening? Why another mass shooting? Why such devastating wildfires and series of destructive hurricanes that killed hundreds and left thousands homeless? Where is God in the midst of all of these tragedies?

I wish I have a clear and simple answer for you, but unfortunately I don’t. There are many things that happen in this world that we do not know how to explain, neither shall we attempt to figure them out with our human knowledge. For God is God and we are not! We take it upon by faith and trust that God is ultimately in control and we pray that God’s kingdom will be established.

But one thing we do know for sure is that God is not some authoritarian dictating every happenings of our lives with a remote control from a distance. **God’s kingdom is both present AND beyond this world that we see.** God is intimately hands-on while yielding to us certain degree of freedom and will to choose.

In the gospel lesson that we read earlier from John, we saw that Jesus was being interrogated by the Pontius Pilate who had both the authority to release him or to sentence him to death. Pilate was seemingly in control of Jesus’ fate and destiny…or was he? Pilate placed before Jesus a question concerning Jesus’s allegiance and his identity. “***Are you the King of the Jews****?”* Pilate asked.

This was a loaded question intended to trap Jesus with his response, but Jesus’ response served as a critical shift in power. Who is ultimately in charge here…the Emperor and Pilate or God and Jesus? Whichever way Jesus responded, the Pharisee would almost certainly find enough points of accusation for blasphemy to put Jesus on the cross. But Jesus knew his overall mission was to proclaim and to establish God’s greater heavenly kingdom here on earth and for the salvation of human kind.

The kingdom to which Jesus belongs, is not a political reality but a theological one.[[1]](#footnote-1) Jesus was focused upon the kin-dom, as in one’s relationship with God and with one another, rather than the kingdom, which is built upon a system of hierarchy and governing power and authority. **Jesus’ earthly mission was to reconcile this broken relationship between God and humanity, and among ourselves.**

Jesus was put on trial by Pilate, not for what he did, but for who he was and what he represented. Pilate could care less about Jesus’ charge of blasphemy of claiming to be God’s Son. Pilate’s main concern was if Jesus claimed to be the King, then the kingship and the authority of the emperor would be challenged…and that must not happen while under his watch.

**Jesus’s kingship is beyond what we could humanly see on this earth and his subjects are far beyond just the Jews, but of all the humanity – Jews and Gentiles alike.**

On this last Sunday of the liturgical season - *Christ the King* Sunday, we have been invited to pause and reflect upon our ultimate allegiance to our God. **Who reigns supreme in our lives? Who do we ultimately worship? God or what this world has to offer?**

The reality is…often times we might find ourselves caught in the middle like Pilate - between worldly influences and popular opinions while succumbing our faith and allegiance to God. Some may choose the “otherness” of our lives to supplement or even replace our faith and allegiance in God. We might feel being held hostage by our own worldly fears and insecurities, instead of being free and liberated by what Christ has assured and promised us.

During this coming season of Advent, amidst the glowing and dazzling displays of distractions, headlines that may grappled our attention, or various forms of temptations of earthly pleasures and material frenzy, **may we make a conscious effort in re-claiming and re-examining our true allegiance, our fidelity and our belonging in Christ**.

The world needs to see more of God’s light as radiated and shined through our lives. Be as Christ’s ambassadors of LOVE during this season of Hope. Be a prayer warrior for someone whom you may not know! Pray for them, encourage them, and support them in any way we can.

As James tells us*, let us confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective.[[2]](#footnote-2)* It all begins with US!

**Sometimes living out our everyday lives in this world may seem like we are being put on a trial or a test.** How would WE respond when we are being asked by Jesus, ***“who do YOU say that I am?”*** **How would we respond to that?**

As in our Presbyterian Church’s *Brief Statement of Faith*, we confess that ***“in life and in death we belong to God.”******(2x)***

This is a profound and comforting statement in declaring our ultimate allegiance and belonging is with God. We boldly proclaim with convictions that **Christ is our King of Kings and our Lord of Lords. And He is our Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End.**

We declare that Christ, who transcends through all times and spaces, will continue to reign in our lives until he returns once again.This, my friends, is our greatest joy and the most comforting hope that deserve all of our thanksgiving and our praises.

May our thanksgiving not only be a day of celebration and remembrance but a lifelong commitment and perspective of faith that we can live on, as we re-establish and proclaim God’s reign in our lives each day. Thanks be to God. In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, Amen.

1. Nishioka, Rodger *Feasting on the Word, Year B, Volume 4,* p.332 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *James 5:16* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)