

Our opening hymn this morning – Rejoice, the Lord is King – was selected because today is the conclusion of the Christian calendar year. Today is the final Sunday of this trip around the sun. We have been through the seasons of Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter, Pentecost and “ordinary time”. So, we conclude the year with a traditional hymn on this Sunday when Christians celebrate the Reign of Christ. The Reign of Christ in the Kingdom of God is the climax of our story of the journey through the past 12 months.

In the past year we have heard many stories. Each Sunday we hear a story that tells us something about the Kingdom of God. It is a kingdom that we referred to in our opening prayer this week. Jesus reign in:

- a community of wholeness;
- a realm of peace;
- a place in which all who hunger and thirst are nourished;
- in which the stranger is welcomed;
- the hurting are healed;
- and the captive ones are set free.

At Queen’s Theological College I heard one of the stories of what the Kingdom of God looks like when I heard Senator Hugh Segal answer a question. To me, it illustrated the power of stories that influence lives, and why we need to tell our stories - stories that are witnesses to the truth of God’s reign in God’s world.

Senator Segal told us a story about what happened one winter when he was a child in Montreal. His family was living on the second floor of a triplex; his Dad was unemployed at the time; and his Mom was working all night as a cashier in a pharmacy that was open 24 hours a day.

Hugie Segal came home from school one afternoon and noticed that his wooden toy box was gone. This was a box that was placed in the corner of a room, and I understand from his description that it was quite substantial. Hughie’s toys were neatly piled in the corner, but the wooden toy box was gone.

Hughie asked his Dad about it and his Dad replied that the man who lived upstairs, who was also unemployed, had visited him that day. The family upstairs had five children, and no heat in the house. Hugh’s Dad had been asked to help the family upstairs buy some wood for the stove, but the Segals had no money to spare.

Hugh said that he had thrown himself into a tantrum, knowing where his toy box had gone.

The next morning, when she returned from work, and before Hugh went to school, his Mom took him aside and asked a couple of questions. One was:

*How do you think the man upstairs felt when he had no money to keep his family warm in the middle of winter?*

*How do you think that your father felt giving them the toy box you loved?*

At the conference at Queen's, Lois Wilson, also a Senator and a former Moderator of the United Church of Canada, said that we always meet the Divine One in other people. She even said that she had met the Divine in one or two people at the Conference – leaving the rest of us to wonder about that statement.

Lois also told us that religion is about imagination, not about doctrine. The Kingdom of God is a world that we imagine to be possible;

- a place of peace and justice;
- a place where all have sufficient food to eat and
- a safe place to call home.

The Kingdom of God is about our relationships with one another, AND with the God who is present among us all.

All around us we see the story of Empire, and how that story treats God's children:

- one in six of God's children in this world go to bed hungry
- child poverty continues in Canada, even though politicians in Ottawa unanimously voted to eliminate it by the year 2000
- housing is available to people of means, and not to all. What we have is a nation that provides starter palaces for entry level monarchs.
- there is no leadership being shown to be a part of a world community meeting in Copenhagen next month to sign a treaty – a treaty that would commit us all to creating a liveable world for future generations.

The story of Empire is one that was told in the corporate media this week – a story of the riches of the Thomson family; the McCain family, the Rogers family, and so on.

Meanwhile, Jesus tells another story – a story about the Kingdom of God; a story that says, “**one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.**”<sup>1</sup> Jesus instructs us in God’s way by telling a parable about a rich person who continually put up new and larger barns. In the parable, God calls the rich person “a fool.”<sup>2</sup>

On Friday morning I was listening to Matt Galloway on the CBC and I heard him saying that;

*“This is the time when people think about giving.”*

Yes, this is a season when a lot of charitable giving happens, for some reason. However, in Christian communities giving and sharing happens all year ‘round. Generosity is one of the core values of the Kingdom of God.

In addition, Christian communities not only share with those who are in need, we ask WHY is this necessary? The truth is that there is ENOUGH for all BUT in the story of Empire, there is never ENOUGH.

the story of the empire is one of scarcity.  
Jesus story is about a world of abundance!

You may tire of me quoting Helder Camara:

*“When I give bread to the poor,  
they call me a saint.  
When I ask why the poor have no bread,  
they call me a communist.*

Dom Helder Camara is a Christian following the TRUTH of God’s way.

In the story from the Gospel According to John that Henry read this morning, Jesus was on trial in front of Pilate, the representative of the Roman Empire. There is a very interesting quote in the story. Jesus, at the conclusion of the time with Pilate, tells the world about his calling in life. Jesus said:

**“For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth.”<sup>3</sup>**

Jesus did not say that his purpose in life, according to this version of the story, was to die on a cross as a sacrifice for others. He said that his purpose was to testify to the truth.

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 12:15

<sup>2</sup> Luke 12:20

<sup>3</sup> John18:37

Jesus speaks truth to power. He speaks about ultimate power. This power of love that unfolds whenever people choose to live in the way of God; a way that Jesus taught.

The story of Jesus, as told in Luke's gospel, includes a story about Jesus visiting a rich man by the name of Zacchaeus. Zacchaeus had a moment of conversion and offered to give 50 per cent of his wealth to the poor. He also offered to pay anyone who felt that they had been defrauded four times what they said they were owed.

How did Jesus respond? He said that, "***Today salvation has come to this house.... for the Son of Man came to seek out and save the lost.***"<sup>4</sup>

This is another story about the values of the Kingdom of God. Salvation comes through sharing. Generosity and sharing are core values of the Kingdom of God. Rejoice, because God is here among us helping us every step of the way.

Jesus invites us to take our part in God's reign on earth by living out the truth of that witness; those wise words; those inspiring acts of sharing love in God's world. the Kingdom looks like acts of generosity and sharing – following the examples of Zacchaeus / the Drop Inn here at Newtonbrook / the Segal family.

May God bless all who share for yours is the Kingdom of God.

Singing #27 in More Voices – Creator God You Gave Us Life

Questions for reflection:

How does the story in John's gospel challenge our observance of Christ the King / Reign of Christ Sunday? Is it helpful?

Where do we see / hear witness to the reign of God today?

Was Jesus' true calling to bear witness to "the truth"? What do you believe was the purpose of Jesus' life on earth?

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<sup>4</sup> Luke 19:9,10