

Training for Reigning
Pastor Morgan Murray
West Valley Presbyterian Church

On Oct 31 we celebrated All Saints Day by remembering those from West Valley who influenced us in the faith and have now gone to be with the Lord. As part of that service, we were led by Janet Shaw in a prayer of confession, that went like this:

Eternal God, in every age
you have raised up men and women to live and die in faith. Forgive our indifference to your will.
You have commanded us to speak, but we have been silent. You have called us to do what is just, but we have been fearful. Have mercy on us, your faithless servants.
Keep before us faithful people for us to follow
so that, living with courage and love,
we may inherit the kingdom promised in Jesus Christ,
and reign with him forever. Amen.

Janet invested a lot of time and care into preparing to lead us, and that led her to ask me a question. What is “reign with him” about? What does that mean, and what if I don’t WANT to reign over others?

That is a great question! And it leads us to wonder what Paul was thinking about when he included these lines in his second letter of instruction and encouragement to his protégé Timothy:

Text: 2 Tim 2:11-13 NRSV

11 The saying is sure:
If we have died with him, we will also live with him;
12 if we endure, we will also reign with him;
if we deny him, he will also deny us;
13 if we are faithless, he remains faithful—
for he cannot deny himself.

Paul was in prison again, arrested on his way to Ephesus and taken back to Rome. For the gospel, he says, he is being chained up like a criminal. So for Paul, the promise that we who suffer for Christ will also reign with him is part of this gospel, this good news. And it is part of the “training curriculum” that Timothy needs in order to be an effective leader. Paul begins this part of the letter by saying, “Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David” (vs 8). Part of the gospel is recognizing that are now included in this dynastic story, this royal responsibility.

One of my teachers, Dallas Willard, reminded his students that this life we are living is not just

heaven's waiting room. The point of our lives is not simply to hear the gospel, accept it, and then behave ourselves until it's time for our eternal reward. Dr. Willard reminded us that this is all "training for reigning." All that we are, everything that we do, and all the ways in which we act in this world... it all has eternal consequences.

Core

This life is our training for an eternity of co-reigning with Christ over all of creation.

If anyone has ever captured the beauty and the magnitude of this idea, it is CS Lewis. Last week I got to see the film "A Most Reluctant Convert." It's a film adaptation of Max McLean's oneperson stage performance in which he plays Lewis, reflecting back on his life and how he was transformed from a hard-boiled atheist to Christian apologist. At the end of the film, McClean's final monologue is drawn from Lewis' essay The Weight of Glory. McClean-as-Lewis says:

It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you can talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare. All day long we are, in some degree, helping each other to one or other of these destinations.

It is in the light of these overwhelming possibilities... that we should conduct all our dealings with one another, all friendships, all loves, all play, all politics. There are no ordinary people. **You have never talked to a mere mortal.**

Next to the Blessed Sacrament itself, your neighbour is the holiest object presented to your senses.

So what does it mean to "reign with Christ"? Is it about thrones and privilege and cohesive force? James and John the Zebedee brothers thought so. Remember that they were the two of the Twelve who pulled Jesus aside and asked, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory" (Mark 10:37). Pilate thought so. When Jesus was brought before him, Pilate wanted to know: If you King of the Jews, why are your own people turning on you instead of rallying behind you to challenge Rome?

Over and over again, Jesus King of the Universe up-ends our understanding of power. To James and John and us he says:

You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. 43 But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, 44 and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. 45 For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many. Mark 10:42-45 NRSV

To Pilate, Jesus responds:

My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here. (John 18:36)

To reign with Christ is not about power-tripping, it is about power stripping. It is about the self-emptying love that Christ that tears down every stronghold of sin and death and violence. To reign with Christ is to die to self and to serve the common good. To reign with Christ is put other first, to be practice extravagant generosity and scandalous mercy. In a word,

Reigning with Christ means accepting our role as co-stewards of everything, expressed through self-giving love.

This is serious work. Paul took it super seriously. Not only is it serious work, it is *forever* work. And Paul understood that it was work that does not start when we die. It starts when we are born – born again, in Christ. In other words, it starts NOW. That’s why Paul, when chastising the church in Corinth for their bad behavior that even included taking each other to court, will ask:

Do you not know that we are to judge angels—to say nothing of ordinary matters? (1 Cor 6:3)

We, even more than the church in Corinth, need to be reminded that Christ did not die for our comfort. Christ died to show us how to die. Christ was not raised to protect the powerful. Christ was raised to inaugurate justice for the powerless.

Max McClean ends his biopic with these words from Lewis:

The load, or weight, or burden of my neighbour’s glory should be laid on my back, a load so heavy that only humility can carry it, and the backs of the proud will be broken.

Doesn’t that sound like the kind of reign Jesus inaugurated? And doesn’t that sound like the kind of reign we are learning to share?

Today is Christ the King Sunday, which essentially marks the end of the liturgical calendar year. Next Sunday is the beginning of Advent, the liturgical new year. As religious observances go, Christ the King Sunday is a pretty new thing. Pope Pius XI (the eleventh) established it in 1925 in direct response to what he regarded to be the destructive forces of fascism and the totalitarian claims of Nazi ideology.

Today, nearly one hundred years later, we are more aware than ever that proclaiming Jesus Christ as Lord is a political act and that living Christ as Lord must necessarily cost us everything. We gotta get our gospel right.

Shakespeare observed: “Heavy the head that wears the crown.” (Henry IV Part 2)

I hope your crown feels a little heavier right now.

Let us pray.