

Last Sunday of the Church Year / Christ the King • November 24, 2019<sup>i</sup>

St. John's Lutheran Church, Alexandria, VA

Rev. Braun Campbell

Colossians 1:13-20

“Unending”

It's over! The church year draws to a close this weekend, and many Christians along with us are observing the festival of Christ the King. It's taken a while to get here. We've journeyed through seasons of Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter, and all those Sundays after Pentecost to arrive at the last station on the line. Did you think it was ever going to end? But now, as you head out and go back home, comforted in the knowledge that you've reached the finish line of the church year, you can now rest and relax, right? It's over! What else do you have to do?

Ever seen the movie *Groundhog Day*? It stars Bill Murray as Phil Connors, a TV weatherman who, during an assignment covering the annual Groundhog Day event in Punxsutawney, PA, is caught in a time loop, repeatedly reliving the same day over and over and over again. The church year is a little like that. Since it's a cycle, whether you've got the variety of the three-year lectionary or the consistency of the one-year, it all begins anew in a week's time with the season of Advent. It's an unending loop – or spiral, maybe – that we choose to observe. We keep with this cycle because the church year is meant to point us to our Savior and his work in history to rescue our broken world, to rescue us. So yes, Advent is coming, with the Christmas season right behind; but we're not there yet. Before the new church year begins, the current one must come to its ending. And what an ending it is!

The Last Sunday of the Church Year is the culmination of everything that preceded it. It's pointing us to the hope of our faith, the reason that the church year exists in the first place: **it's about Jesus**. The readings today show us who he is, who God is, because *“He is the image of the invisible God.”* “[I]n him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.” Jesus is the King who acts for his creation, for his people, for you. And as the church year comes to an end, we get another opportunity to remember and celebrate what he's done for us.

You and I were trapped in an unending loop: the inward spiraling that kept us from focusing on the God who created us and designed us to be in relationship with him and the world around us. You know the fancy theological word for that? “Sin.” Stuck in sin, you keep chasing after whatever seems good in your own eyes, spiraling down and down into yourself and apart from everyone else. The last station on the line would be death and unending separation from your Creator. But He wouldn't let that stand. He stepped in. Christ the King defeated sin, death, and the devil for you and me. And now God *“has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”* (1:13-14)

*Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven...* How often have you prayed these very words? Your kingdom come... on earth as it is in heaven. Did you think God would answer your prayer? Because He has. God the Son stepped down from heaven into earth, bringing the Kingdom along with him. You aren't trapped in an unending loop anymore. You, and all those liberated denizens of the domain of darkness who are now called to follow Christ the King, are now reconciled to God. You are redeemed by the one who created all things.

You have a King. That's a tough concept for most Americans to wrap their heads around, but it's the best way to put it. Christ is the preeminent One, the authority above all authorities; he's in charge, whether we would follow him or not. If you visit the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Northeast DC, you can see this massive image stretching across the dome of the apse at the far end of the interior space, behind the chancel. Its name is “Christ in Majesty,” and it is possibly the largest mosaic of Jesus in the world. The mosaic depicts Jesus in his majesty as victor over sin and death, arms raised to reveal the marks of the crucifixion in his hands, a halo of light and fire surrounding his head. This is not a “buddy Jesus.” This Jesus means business. This Jesus makes things happen. This is Christ the King.

All things were created through Christ, the Word of God, and created for him. That includes you. You've been redeemed by your Creator. He's bought your freedom with his perfect life. That's the price of peace, why Jesus and his people are linked with the sign of the cross. It's our King's throne, just as much as he reigns in glory even now as we await his second advent and the end of our world's brokenness. That's

why we see “Christ in Majesty” displaying the marks of Jesus’ Passion in his hands and side, because by his wounds we and our world are healed. He’s here for you.

Today the King welcomes you, the people of his kingdom, to join him at his table. He is the Lord enthroned in heavenly splendor, as we’ll sing in our hymn of the day, who comes down to be with you and me who were once trapped in the unending loop of trying to feed our hunger with whatever seemed good in our own eyes. So come and gather around the King who will feed you with the best food and drink, a small preview that we get to experience as we mark the Last Sunday of the Church Year, looking ahead to his return.

You’re a herald of this King for all those people that God has placed in your life. You get to share the gifts that he has won, for you and for them, alike. You share those gifts as you listen to them, as you do good for them, as you pray for them. The Holy Spirit is working through you, bringing your neighbor out from the domain of darkness to experience the life that comes from the kingdom of the Son.

As we come to the close of one church year and look ahead to what follows, may you especially experience and share the peace that our King brings into the world. It’s not a passing peace. It’s not feeble or affected. Look at this King, in whom we get to see the image of the invisible God! By the blood of his cross, Jesus has made real, unending peace with God our new reality. No matter what else comes down the line, in this year or any of the next, remember that nothing can snatch that away. In Christ, all things hold together – us, too!

It’s over! Our life in Christ the King is not *Groundhog Day*. God has redeemed you and brought you into His kingdom. Go out today, this weekend, this Christ the King Sunday, in hope... unending hope. Look ahead to what’s to come. Look ahead to who’s to come.

You have a King, enthroned on the cross and enthroned in heavenly splendor. A King risen, a King ascended, a King glorified, a King unending.

**Amen.**

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<sup>1</sup> Passage for memory:

*For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, <sup>20</sup>and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. – Colossians 1:19-20*