

## **The Alpha and the Omega**

Revelation 4b-8

John 18: 33-37

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### *Revelation 4b-8*

Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood, and made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. Look! He is coming with the clouds; every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and on his account all the tribes of the earth will wail. So it is to be. Amen. “I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.

### *John 18: 33-37*

Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, ‘Are you the King of the Jews?’ Jesus answered, ‘Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?’ Pilate replied, ‘I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?’ Jesus answered, ‘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.’ Pilate asked him, ‘So you are a king?’ Jesus answered, ‘You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.’

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There’s excitement and energy buzzing at our house--and I imagine yours too—as we plan for a Thanksgiving gathering that is certainly unlike the one we celebrated on the phone and on Zoom last year. We are planning for all the tradition we can as seven of us will get together for the Macy’s parade on TV, an incredible turkey dinner, football games, board games, and then too many leftovers. We will do this all this year with a different and deeper sense of gratitude and appreciation to God and for each other, and with a greater awareness of just how important our family and health are. We will look at our lives and look at what is good, what has been overcome, what has been learned from, and say to God, “thank you.” Thank you that we are here together, thank you for the food on the table, and after this year, there will be long, rich list of ways that we are grateful. Radically grateful.

That is one of many lessons from Covid--don’t take anything for granted any more. All those routines that are everyday ordinary, are no longer quite so ordinary or routine. Maybe—just maybe—we might all learn to put a pause on our cultural rewrite of Thanksgiving as a day to be gobbled and dashed through before Black Friday sales that begin at midnight. Thanks-giving, and instead this day, this season, give thanks to God for one another, for so many blessings each and every day that can go by almost unnoticed, unappreciated, yet mean everything.

Our gratitude and thanksgiving are things we celebrate in many ways today. As Christians we honor Christ the King Sunday. On the last Sunday after Pentecost, before the

beginning of Advent that starts the new Church Year, this Sunday completes our journey through the life of Jesus Christ and the Gospel message. What we began on the first Sunday of Advent—expectant waiting in the darkness for the Messiah—brings us now to celebrate the permanence and preeminence of Jesus as King, as Alpha and Omega, over all creation, over all eternity. Our gratitude and thanksgiving as the congregation of Smith Church will continue when we gather to discuss the 2022 budget and look at the ways we are planning our financial gifts and stewardship as active signs of God’s presence in our lives, in our local ministry ways of outreach, and in ways that extend through the community and beyond. How we give back from the abundance of gifts that God has given to us is a measure of how we welcome Christ to rule in our hearts.

Our gratitude and thanksgiving will later be shared this afternoon when we gather here with other Christian churches and people from the community for a Thanksgiving worship service to offer our shared gratefulness to God for abundant blessings. From a variety of faith practices and traditions that all equally celebrate God’s lovingkindness and generosity, we will gather as a community in appreciation.

Our gratitude and thanksgiving begin this morning on Christ the King Sunday, the day on which Christians proclaim that our commitment and faithfulness is to the power of Christ’s love, to the Alpha and Omega, and we offer our radical thanksgiving for Jesus’ radical gift. But before we get there, let’s spend a moment on the very idea of ‘Christ the King.’ For us, the image of a ‘king’ is foreign as we think of monarchies around the world, or the Hollywood fantasies of royalty, but it is not something out of our own lived experience, so let’s begin with what Christ the King is *not*.

Given the amount of struggle, misery, and conflict in our world, what are we trying to say about Jesus Christ, about Christianity, when we say, ‘Christ the King,’ - the ‘Alpha and Omega?’ We are not saying that in any way is Jesus above or disconnected from the pains, strife, and stresses of the world as though struggle was merely the untouchable lot of the peasants. Jesus was born under an oppressive political regime, lived, taught, healed, and suffered in the midst of oppression and challenge. His kingship is counter-cultural, it is not of this world, as he came to proclaim the truth of God’s kingdom as God’s authority and rule, the truth of God’s kingdom not as a place but as a responsibility and a role, as a servant, not as power.

What we do today as we commemorate Christ the King, is that we affirm and celebrate that Jesus the Christ is the Lord of all creation, the beginning and the end, the Alpha and Omega, the Word through whom all that is created was created. What we do today as we celebrate Christ the King, is, as Susan Grace so beautifully says, is that we “remember the enormity of what we believe – that the one who joined us in human flesh was no less than the divine source of all life. It is good to humbly acknowledge that when we seek Christ we seek connection with the very life force that pulses throughout the universe. It is good to be reminded that when we say we worship Jesus as the son of God that we are engaging with the One so powerful and mysterious that we are arrogant fools if we think that we can order God around with our little theologies and understandings but that we have given ourselves over into the hands of the living God and that this is a wonderfully terrible thing. The language of Christ the King might remind us that awe, fear, excitement are appropriate responses to the nearness of God and God’s kingdom.”<sup>i</sup>

Indeed--awe, fear, and excitement are at the heart of our response to God, to the Alpha and Omega, to Christ the King, to the enormity of who and what we believe, as we give ourselves over into the hands of the living God with radical gratitude and thanksgiving for the kingdom of God, the reign of Christ. There is no doubt God loves us, and has redeemed us. We are a part of God's kingdom, serving and doing God's work by our stewardship, our discipleship, our commitment.

When we claim Christ as our King we claim our place in God's kingdom, giving ourselves over to the authority and rule of God, giving ourselves through our hearts, hands and minds, through our time and talents, through our financial support of the church, always mindful that we have been entrusted with gifts from God—gifts that are monetary, skills, or knowledge—to build up the kingdom as active signs that reflect God's presence in our lives and in our values. How we live as good, wise, and faithful stewards, how we give back from the abundance of gifts that God has given to us is a measure of how we welcome Christ the King to rule in our hearts.

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.companionsontheway.com/post/what-sort-of-king>