**First Reading Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14**

*To the community for whom this passage was written, it seemed as though the oppression they were experiencing would never end. Daniel’s message is: It shall end. The Ancient One, who is judge, will call all nations to account and will give dominion to “one like a human being,” the Messiah.*

9 As I watched, thrones were set in place, and an Ancient One took his throne, his clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was fiery flames, and its wheels were burning fire. 10 A stream of fire issued and flowed out from his presence. A thousand thousands served him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood attending him. The court sat in judgment, and the books were opened. 13 As I watched in the night visions, I saw one like a human being coming with the clouds of heaven. And he came to the Ancient One and was presented before him. 14 To him was given dominion and glory and kingship, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, and his kingship is one that shall never be destroyed.

**Psalm 93**

1 The Lord is king, robed in majesty; the Lord is robed in majesty and armed with strength. The Lord has made the world so sure that it cannot be moved. 2 Ever since the world began, your throne has been established; you are from everlasting. 3 The waters have lifted up, O Lord, the waters have lifted up their voice; the waters have lifted up their pounding waves. 4 Mightier than the sound of many waters, mightier than the breakers of the sea, mightier is the Lord who dwells on high. 5 Your testimonies are very sure, and holiness befits your house, O Lord, forever and forevermore.

**Second Reading Revelation 1:4b-8**

*The book of Revelation begins by celebrating the Almighty God, who spans all of time. Similarly, Jesus is celebrated as the firstborn from the dead who rules over the world’s rulers. He is the one whose return we eagerly await.*

4b 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, 5 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, 6 and made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father,

to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. 7 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. 8 “I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.

**Gospel John 18:33-37**

*In John’s gospel, the story of Jesus and Pilate presents two different ways of exercising power: through force or with love.*

33 Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” 34 Jesus answered, “Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?” 35 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?” 36 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.” 37 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. Every one who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.”

**Sermon**

Today we celebrate the festival of Christ the King, or some call it Reign of Christ. This festival always falls on the last Sunday of the church calendar. So, this week is the New Year’s Eve of the church calendar. Isn’t that interesting? The church year turns over to a new year one month before the calendar year begins a new year. The church year ends with the festival of Christ the King, and it begins with the 1st Sunday of the Season of Advent which is the season of preparation for Christmas. And maybe some of us are wondering why the difference, why does the church have to be so weird, why can’t we just go with the flow?

In Confirmation class a few weeks ago, the God Squad learned all about the church calendar. They worked together to fill in the colors of the different seasons as well as the festivals and commemorations that fall on weekdays throughout the coming year on a large 2025 calendar. That calendar is hanging on the wall across from my office. What we learned about the church calendar is that it is based on the life of Jesus. The seasons are scheduled according to when the birth of Jesus and the resurrection of Jesus occur each year. And isn’t

that fitting for the church? That our time be ordered by the life, death and resurrection of our Savior? And yes, one aspect of our life as people of faith is to be countercultural, that is, not following the prevailing values and behavior of the society in which we live. The church calendar reminds us of this. Today’s gospel also reminds us that the kingdom that Jesus ushered into this world functions unlike the ways that humanity rules.

The scene in today’s passage from John’s gospel is Jesus’ conversation with Pilate after Jesus’ arrest. Now Pilate isn’t really a “king,” but he is a powerful ruler over Jerusalem and the nearby towns, who was appointed to his position by the “king” at that time, the Emperor. Pilate was given this position of power by the “king” and it was to the “king” that he owed his loyalty. This conversation between Pilate and Jesus reminds me vaguely of the conversation Jesus had with Nicodemus and the woman at the well earlier in John’s gospel. It is a conversation in which Jesus is speaking of something that Pilate doesn’t seem to be able to grasp.

Indeed, he can’t grasp it, he can’t imagine any other “king” trying to exercise his authority in his territory, in the Emperor’s territory. That doesn’t fly in the Roman Empire, all authority and loyalty belongs to the Emperor. But more than that, I would say that Pilate can’t imagine someone lauded as someone being accused of being a king standing in front of him so calm and peacefully in demeanor and speech. He had been arrested. But he wasn’t yelling, he wasn’t raging like a caged animal. Jesus is standing there with the most powerful man in Jerusalem who was to decide what to do with him. And Jesus spoke to him like they were having a leisurely conversation. That must have boggled Pilate’s mind because Pilate can’t grasp an authority somehow outside the Emperors…he can’t grasp a so-called “king” wouldn’t be aggressive and fighting…he can’t imagine power that would fold in the face of threat and opposition.

And let’s sit here with Pilate for a moment because I think we know where he is coming from. We too are highly influenced by the ways of this world…the ways of our leaders, the ways of those who have a lot of power and influence in our society, even the ways of the people around whom we spend much of our time. And what we see too often is selfishness, combativeness, wastefulness, over-indulgence, intolerance and inability to listen to different ideas and perspectives, indifference to what is important, victim-blaming, even hatred. Given

that these are part of our everyday experience, even if it is only what we hear about, we can understand Pilate’s puzzlement as he questions Jesus. What kind of animal is this Jesus? He is nothing like anyone Pilate, or anyone we have ever encountered. What’s up with him?

Jesus is the Word of God made flesh, God in human form, who came, not to fight a sinful, broken humanity, not to overcome a sinful humanity with force to impose God’s rule upon us but to renew relationship with a sinful, broken humanity. The God who created us, revealed in Jesus, is one who uses power to create, to give life and goodness to all of God’s creation. Force, violence and combativeness lead to injury, brokenness and death. God, through Christ, bypassed the ways of this world in favor of God’s ways which, though humanity caused injury and death through the cross, Christ created salvation and redemption for humanity.

And now we stand in awe of Christ the king and the kingdom of God that give life and salvation to all that God has made by turning the values of this world on their head. This kingdom does not come through force…this kingdom is not exclusive…this kingdom lives on even when the kingdoms of this world fall…this kingdom is present regardless of what good or bad is happening in the world because this kingdom is not of this world, not controlled by this world.

Anytime Christ our King is present, anytime the kingdom of God is present, we will be left in awe. When our sins are forgiven, even though we feel terrible about what we’ve done. When those who seemingly have the least to live on are filled with gratitude for what God has given. When generosity comes at just the right time. When someone selflessly volunteers to jump in and help. When a community comes together for the benefit of a small business or a family or an individual in need. When people from two opposing groups are able to see the humanity in one another and learn more about one another’s life and perspective. When those who have power and privilege in their community use it to bring those without power and privilege to the table so that their voices can be heard.

Today we celebrate the reign of our God through Christ which runs counter to the ways of the dominant culture in our society. We celebrate the invitation that Christ has extended to us to participate in that kingdom through our baptismal life, living in the freedom of being loved, forgiven children of God by looking out for the well-being of our neighbor in need.

According to this kingdom, which our risen king set loose in the world, true power is reaching down to those who have been pushed down, reaching out to one another in relationship. We may not see this EVERYWHERE. We may hear lots more stories about the problems in our world, the selfishness of those who have power and influence, the wars that cause destruction and pain. But the kingdom of God will ALWAYS be present as well reminding us that there is more than one power at work in this world. It is the reign of our just, reconciling, peaceful, humble king, Jesus the Christ. Amen.