

Christ the King Sunday

November 26, 2017

Psalm 47

How Awesome is Christ the King

Rev. George Ferch

Dear subjects of the King of king and Lord of lords,

The word “awesome” is one of the most over used adjectives in the English language. People use “awesome” so often and with such little thought for the context, they virtually have emptied the word of its implications.

Awesome means striking fear, stirring. If one is awesome, the thought or sight of him stops us in our tracks. It drops our jaws open. Luther and the King James Bible both translate the term as “terrible.” The sons of Korah used this word to describe “God, the LORD Most High.”

On this last Sunday of the church year, we stop dead in our tracks with mouths agape before the one who created us, redeemed us, and calls us by name because we are his. Saints, Behold, the sight is glorious! From our open jaws we sing praise while we clap our hands. The theme of our “cries of joy” is **How Awesome is Christ the King.** He has ascended on high. The world belongs to him.

Jesus Christ our God has ascended on high. Jesus sits at God the Father’s right hand because he redeemed us from our sins with their guilt and punishment. We see Jesus in our gospel lesson doing his work. The soldiers mocked Jesus. Although they unknowingly, but correctly, identified Jesus as King. “Then they led him away to crucify him.” Jesus did not look regal hanging on the cross. Yet it was there in his deep humiliation that Jesus completed the work of earning our forgiveness of sins and eternal salvation.

In his exalted and resurrected body our Savior, our King, has ascended on high. Christ the King Sunday parallels Christ’s Ascension. We have our joy in his redemption. We clap our hands and praise God as Jesus returns victorious as God and Man to his throne in heaven. This is why we are able not to cower in fear but stand in trust and sing, “How awesome is the Lord Most High, the great King over all the earth.”

Christ’s ascending into heaven amidst “shouts of joy and the sounding of trumpets” means he is on high preparing our inheritance. Our joy is in our inheritance. The Psalmist wrote, “He chose our inheritance for us, the pride of Jacob, whom he loved.” Jacob is our spiritual father. We are Jacob’s pride because we, the church, share Jacob’s faith in God’s promise of the Savior. God loved Jacob and gave him that promise of the Savior as an inheritance from his Father, Isaac.

So, all the blessings of Christ Jacob possessed, we share. God chose them for Jacob and for us. We have inherited the salvation God prepared for us in Christ. We have the forgiveness of sins. And where there is the forgiveness of sins there is life and salvation, Luther explained.

We share those blessings with others. We share so others will not fear and tremble before the awesome LORD Most High. God calls us to lead them to see their sin, repent and be saved. We want all to join us as the Bride of our Heavenly Bridegroom. In Psalm 45 we read, “The king is enthralled by your beauty; honor him, for he is your lord.” The beauty that entralls our King is Christ’s righteousness in which we walk. It is his holy blood that covers us. Christ’s work of

redeeming the whole world, because of which he has ascended on high, makes us clap and shout, “How awesome is Christ the Lord!”

Now, what does the Psalm writer mean that God reigns over the nations and the world belongs to him? He is the great king over all the earth with his power. He is the king who changes former enemies into members of his people as the God of Abraham.

We do not have to draw our own picture of God sitting on his throne, ruling the nations. Those images do not have to come from inside of us. The Holy Spirit has revealed in the Bible the holy God sitting on his throne. We saw that revelation two weeks ago in Daniel’s vision. Here the Psalmist wrote, “For God is the King of all the earth...God reigns over the nations; God is seated on this throne.”

God does not sit on his throne in heaven and watch the world much as we sit in on our couch watching television. God is no mere passive spectator of world events. God’s reign is a rule of action in world events. God intercedes and controls things for the good of the church. With the same power the Father exerted in Christ by raising him from the dead, he gave Christ the authority and appointment to rule, Paul wrote to the Ephesians in chapter 1.

This does not mean, of course, that Christ moves people and events around like pieces on a chess board. In God’s providence and Christ’s rule, the Holy Spirit moves believers to act in love that reaps benefits to the world. God allows unbelievers to cause harm in their unbelief. God is so powerful in his rule that he takes even those sinful acts, even our foolish sinful acts according to the flesh, and makes them work for our good according to his purposes. This is the working of God’s kingdom of power.

Psalm 47 speaks more to the power and authority of the gospel as we take it out into the world. God does not rule by force with the sword. Soon, God willing, we will sing in Joy to the World, “He rules the world with truth and grace.” This is Christ’s saving rule through his promise, “I have forgiven all your sins.” This is the rule that changes people’s hearts and creates peace. The world belongs to him as the LORD Most High adds to the church daily those who are being saved.

God changes foreigners and enemies; distant gentile peoples and powerful rulers. “The nobles of the nations assemble as the people of the God of Abraham, for the kings of the earth belong to God; he is greatly exalted.” We dare not forget there are rulers, whose office is to care for and protect their people, who too belong to our God and Savior. They applaud Christ’s triumph and greatly exalt God.

Christ’s kingdom has come into our sinful hearts with his word of grace. We pray together in the Second Petition of the Lord’s Prayer that the Holy Spirit continue this blessing. We also pray in this petition that Christ continues to conquer the world one sinner at a time through the good news, “A Savior is born to you; he is Christ, the Lord.” The law shows us our sins and condemns us before God. Christ’s saving rule in our hearts, his kingdom of grace, sets us apart into true Israel with David’s son and David’s Lord sitting on the throne reigning over us.

How awesome is the Most High, the king of the whole earth! “You ask, ‘Who is this?’ Jesus Christ it is, The Almighty Lord. And there’s no other God; He holds the field forever.” CW 200:2 Amen. <SDG>