

Mystic Congregational Church, UCC

Mystic, Connecticut

Sermon from November 22, 2009

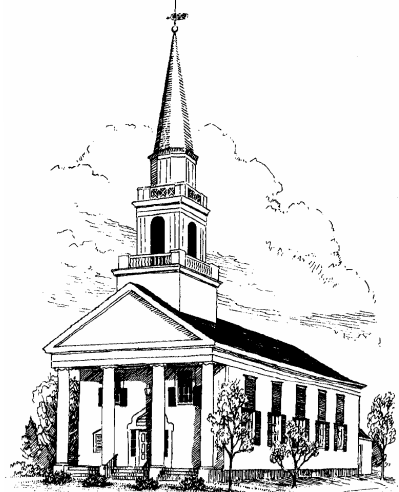
Rev. Ann M. Aaberg

“Especially for Jesus Christ”

Scriptures:

Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14

John 18:33-37



Here we go again. We're standing in that crazy place again, that place where this world meets the one beyond, where past and future and present collide, where we look backward to look forward, where the marquee could conceivably read: Pontius Pilate Meets the Pilgrims. Today is Thanksgiving Sunday when we remember our ancestors' gratitude to God for safety and abundance. Today is the last Sunday of our liturgical year, our church year, when we wrap up our annual journey from Bethlehem through the Passion and the Resurrection to declare at the end of it all that, indeed, Christ is King. Our scripture passage sounds like Easter, next Sunday is the first Sunday of Advent, and this morning our Sunday School children practiced the Christmas Pageant! And within days we'll all be eating turkey!

Many of us, also upon hearing today's date, November 22, made the connection to the same day in 1963, when the world was thrown into pain and we remember where we were when the news came. Others know of that day only from history lessons and, instead, may be mired today in a different kind of pain: from job loss, from shrinking resources at the start of the holiday season, from physical pain, whether from the illness itself or the treatment, from emotional pain, from just desperately hanging on in the midst of worry, fear, and loss.

Others are joyously celebrating: their engagements to be married, the birth of healthy children, happy anniversaries, the long lives of their parents, early acceptances to colleges, and a myriad of "yes" answers to their prayers—the new job that starts Monday, the clean bill of health, the promise to try again to be sober.

In the life of our own church on this day, we began by celebrating the ministries of our children, then we solemnly prayed for the healing of this warring world and the desperate people in it, and by the time we're done, we will have welcomed new members into our midst and we'll be eating cake in the Parish Hall.

Yet all of these contrasts, these ups and downs, these beginnings at the same time as endings, these joys sharing the same room with acute sorrows, all pale in comparison to the dual image we have been given of kings this morning. The Ancient One in Daniel's vision, with white clothing and fiery flames surrounded by ten thousand times ten thousand attendants,

a depiction of God as an old man, which, by the way, although it became common in later Jewish and Christian traditions, was unusual for the Hebrew Bible. You may remember that we hear God, but don't see God, we can't lay eyes on a God who is beyond gender, beyond our imagination, beyond our understanding.

We have this glorious, fiery image of the Ancient One and a description of one like a human being coming with the clouds of heaven given dominion and glory and kingship. We can also imagine Pilate's idea of a king, purple robes, holding power over ten thousand times ten thousand and legions of soldiers at his command, and territory and riches.

And here is this dusty prophet, Jesus of Nazareth, arrested and bound as an insurrectionist, having told Peter to put his sword away the night before, offering no resistance, dragged in and quietly explaining who he is in this interchange with the Roman governor. My kingdom is not of this world.

And so we find ourselves on this Thanksgiving Sunday contemplating Christ the King, whose kingdom is not of this world, but who saved it just the same, whose humility, whose non-violent response, whose intense divine love for humanity prevented his abandoning us when we abandoned him, who accepted death on a cross, who gave *his* life for the forgiveness of *our* sins.

And as we count our blessings this week—the food on our tables, the people in our lives, the freedom in our existence—we may want to echo the communion preparation prayers we find in our liturgy which say to God: we thank you for all that sustains life ... especially for Jesus Christ. Above all, we give you thanks for the gift of Jesus. We thank you for Grandma's pumpkin pie. We thank you for the safe return of our troops. We thank you for clean sheets and a warm bed.

Above all, we thank you for Jesus Christ. For it is through the birth and life and teachings and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ that we have hope for our future in the midst of a troubled present and haunting memories, that we can imagine a peaceful world in the midst of war and a history of inhumanity, that we can offer and accept love in the midst of hate. It is because his kingdom is not of this world that we can draw from him, lean on him, confide in him, reach for him when this world becomes too difficult to bear. It is because of Christ the King that we can remember the redemption of Easter on Thanksgiving Day, that we can always, always, give thanks no matter what the pain. We're standing in that crazy place again: on the brink of destruction and the brink of God's eternal kingdom—thankful, especially for Jesus Christ. Amen.