

Today is New Year's Eve in the Christian calendar. We're about to start another wonderfully off-kilter Church year, as the anticipation of Advent gives way to the birth of the Christ child. And before it all begins, on this day, the Reign of Christ, we recognize who's in charge — and of course, it is Jesus Christ. The Reign of Christ is a major event in our church calendar, an acknowledgement of something that has not happened yet. We move from past history into future history and name Christ the King of all, the Lord of all creation. We do this, even as we wait in a world that seldom looks like Christ's kingdom.

So what does Jesus' kingship look like? Jesus' kingship is one that upends our understanding of kingship. It is one of justice and peace, expressed in solidarity with those in need and often in conflict with the powerful elite. It's a shepherd-kingship. We get three different takes on his shepherd-kingship from this morning's readings. First, and most obviously, Paul in Ephesians presents Jesus' shepherd-kingship as emanating from the One who is 'far above all rule and authority and power and dominion.' He is the exalted Son of Man, who sits on the throne of his glory, attended by his angels, rendering decisions on the gathered nations before him. He is referred to as 'king' and 'Lord.'

At the same time, we cannot separate this image of Jesus as king from our memory of him as Son of Man, the one handed over to be crucified. Second then, Scripture presents Jesus' shepherd-kingship not only as one who judges, but as one who has been judged at the hands of humans, of us. As we celebrate the Reign of Christ, we recall that the One seated on his throne in glory is the same one who emptied himself, taking the form of a slave...[and] humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross (Phil 2.7-8).

The third way in which Scripture presents Jesus' shepherd-kingship is as one who adopts as his kin, 'the least of these,' those who are crushed, ground under, cast aside in life. They are people who are not only in need, but who are being rejected because of their neediness: the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick, the imprisoned... 'Just as you did it to one of the least of these who *are members of my family*, you did it to me' (25.40). That's what is so very distinctive about Jesus' shepherd-kingship. There was nothing new about the concept of serving God through serving others. We hear in Proverbs, 'Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the Lord, and will be repaid in full' (19.18). What is distinctive about Jesus' teaching in this morning's Gospel, is the way in which Jesus identifies himself with those in need.

Jesus as Shepherd-King – seated on his throne in glory, laying it all down including his life for us, coming to us in the least, the last and the lost.

During this time of transition if you remember nothing else from me these past six and a half years, please remember this. Jesus as Shepherd-King loves you as his people at 155 Memorial very much. He aches with those for whom our departure is difficult even as he assures us all of even better things to come. As painful as I am finding this, we believe we are responding to the Holy Spirit's call to serve another community. It is as simple as that. By God's grace, we have wanted to be a family in your midst who listens to God's call. So we are leaving because God is sending us. If it is God's call, then it means that our leaving is what is best for you and what is best for us. It means that the piece of ministry and mission the Holy Spirit has brought us together as a community of believers to accomplish is now complete.

Together by God's grace we have penned another chapter in the rich and fruitful life of St. Mark's Brantford. It's a chapter which will be succeeded by another chapter – another chapter which I am confident will be just as vibrant and fecund as the one we have shared – maybe even more so. That's just what God is like and that's what the Gospel is about. God is always moving us along. There are even better days ahead.

You know that I love you and we love you. Sure, I know that I have not been God's gift to everyone. If I have let you down in anyway, if I have hurt you wittingly or unwittingly, if I have not been the priest to you that you have needed me to be, I am truly sorry and I ask your forgiveness. At the same time, please know how deeply grateful we are for the unwavering love and support you have shown us.

We arrived here in 2014 as a young family – Sophie was turning 5 and Felicity was 2. You embraced us, accepted us, encouraged us. You have endured tedious preaching, long-winded newsletter articles, painstaking decision-making – lots of demands on your time and energy-levels. You have borne this in good faith and good humour (most of the time!) You have simply taken me and taken us where we are at and loved us. Please know what an incredible gift that has been to us.

As I have said to you before, there is never a good time to leave a parish. Being called to serve another community in the midst of a pandemic means a different way of saying good-bye. Please know that things are in place and that you are in very good hands. Your wardens are competent and deeply committed. Your ministry team works together extremely well and they know what they are doing. There are skilled and hard-working teams looking after our recorded and in-person worship, our pastoral care network and our compliance with pandemic protocol. Our life during COVID can tick along just as it has. Archdeacon Janet Griffith Clarke, your interim, has a wealth of experience at senior leadership level and she loves parish ministry. She also happens to be a Brantford girl and already knows some of you from school days and her time working in HR at the hospital. She will take very good care of you.

This morning we are celebrating the Reign of Christ, Jesus as Shepherd-King, the Lord of all creation – seated on his throne in glory, laying everything down including his life for us, coming to us in the least, last and lost. May we keep putting Jesus the Shepherd-King first as we devote ourselves to prayer and to those other practices that sustain our spirits in this time of transition. And as servants of the Shepherd-King, please remember we journey always in hope, abounding in hope by the power of the Spirit in Paul's words (Rom 15.13). We journey on confident as Julian of Norwich the fourteen century anchoress puts it, that 'All shall be well, and all shall be well and all manner of thing shall be well.'

God bless, guard and keep you all.