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 Redwoods Presbyterian Church  
 Larkspur, California  
 November 25, 2012  
 2 Samuel 23:1-7; Revelation 1:4b-8; John 18:33-37  
 "Jesus Rules OK"

Today is Christ the King/Reign of Christ Sunday. For most USA Americans, "king" is outdated and archaic. It had biblical significance because of kings in the Hebrew Bible. There, the people wanted a king against God's desire. God gave in and permitted it so long as kings ruled with justice and fairness. Some like King David and good King Hezekiah were just and others were not. That's the history of kings in the Hebrew Bible in a nutshell.

It remained an important designation in the New Testament. Everyone longed for the return of a David-like figure and many people thought Jesus was that person and so they called him "king" although he was not a king in the conventional sense.

Many others thought it an affront to call Jesus king and so confusion reigned. That's the context for the gospel story today. It reads:

"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."

Somewhere in the back of my head I remembered that the word "rule" is a colloquialism, so I looked it up and found it in the *Dictionary of Slang*.

Opposite the word "Rule" it said: Phrase: Accompanying a name which signifies that they are the best. For example, "Frankie rules OK." "Jesus rules OK."

That's okay with me and with Jesus as we see in his brilliant interchange with Pilate. Jesus doesn't deny his kingship. He places it on a different level. Biblically, it goes from the justice of David to another worldly plain (a spiritual reign) in the gospel reading to the elevated realm as described in the Revelation text: Jesus as the ruler of the kings of the earth and "to him be glory and dominion forever and ever."

This is Jesus at his highest and that's why the liturgical year in the Christian calendar ends today. He rules the heavens as one with a sovereign God and he rules the earth. Not every religion or national state recognizes this but the principle needs to be enacted in all the earth according to Christian philosophy.

It is precisely this principle that turns Jesus' spiritual rule into practical, grounded, day-to-day, governance on earth. We are careful not to so spiritualize Jesus that he has no relevance to the way we actually live. Jesus rules in spirit and truth as today's gospel text communicates. It speaks to the way we pray in our rooms and to the way we engage in the city square.

One of the best expressions of this comes in an article this week by Bay Area rabbi, Michael Lerner, in addressing the current vexing situation in Palestine and Israel, and the whole planet for that matter.

Rabbi Lerner is chair of the interfaith (and atheist-welcoming) Network of Spiritual Progressives and rabbi of Beyt Tikkun synagogue in Berkeley. It is fitting that a progressive, inclusive-minded rabbi expresses what Jesus means in the gospel text today. After all, Jesus was called rabbi in much the same way that Lerner is called rabbi. Lerner is not recognized by many of his fellow leaders in much the same way that Jesus was not recognized.

I shall conclude this sermon on the realm of God with Lerner's remarks. In the context of Thanksgiving and Reign of Christ Sunday, he writes (the Christian references are mine):

"Today we give thanks to this incredible universe for all the beauty, the goodness and the miracles that surround us every day and to which we have given too little conscious attention. And we celebrate the ability to be with friends, neighbors, family or others on this holy day of joyful appreciation of all the good in our lives.

"This is the right moment, then, for us to also put forward our prayers or intentions for a world of peace. We who recognize that our ability to live today enjoying all the benefits of North America was achieved in part through a genocidal struggle against the native peoples of this land are not willing to live through another period in which other peoples may be losing their lands to settlers or oppressive colonization.

"This year it is hard not to be dismayed at the murdering that goes on between Israel and Palestine, and the suffering of both Israelis and Palestinians. This Thanksgiving some of us commit ourselves to doing all we can to stop the conflict and to start the process of non-violent open-hearted reconciliation and peace.

"We reject the advice of the 'political realists' who tell us that this struggle will go on forever, at untold levels of human suffering. Instead, we will urge our own government to work with others to impose a cease-fire, and then to convene an international conference of the most powerful and spiritually responsible countries that can act together to build the new consciousness our planet so badly needs.

"Some of us, whether or not we believe in God or Goddess or Spirit, are Spiritual Progressives—that is, people who want the world to be reorganized in ways that promote love, kindness, generosity, ethical and ecological sensitivity, and awe, wonder and radical amazement at the grandeur and mystery of all that is.

"We spiritual progressives believe that the real source of strength for any country or people will come from the degree to which its neighbors and the people of the world see that country as a

source of generous love, social justice, peace, non-violence and generosity toward all and environmental sanity toward the earth.

“So on this Thanksgiving (on this Reign of Christ Sunday) we call upon the world to actively involve itself with bringing peace and prosperity to all places where violence and wars continue to be waged.

“We call upon the advanced industrial countries to launch a domestic and global Marshall Plan by dedicating 1-2% of the GDP of the economically advanced industrial countries of the world, the G-20, to be used to eliminate poverty, homelessness, hunger, inadequate education, inadequate health care, and to repair the global environment—to be paid for by the trillions of dollars that will otherwise be spent on militarism and attempts to dominate and control the world.

“We know that this approach will require major political changes...We affirm the Unity of All Being, the oneness of all with all, and the fundamental interdependence of us who are celebrating Thanksgiving with all other people on the planet and commit ourselves to save this planet from environmental destruction.

“In the spirit of Thanksgiving and in the spirit of Jesus Christ, we affirm our dedication to...peace, social justice, environmental sanity, and a world based on love, caring, kindness and generosity. In so doing, we will make realistic what at first seemed to be unrealistic. And so it is. Amen.”