

Conley Memorial Presbyterian Church, Christ the King Sunday, November 26, 2017

Your Last Words

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Ephesians 1:15-23

This month my sermon topic has been death, not a subject that people care to talk about but something which is inevitable for all of us.

Today is the last Sunday of the church year, Christ the King Sunday, a day in which we celebrate the death of our Lord and Savior but, beyond that, his resurrection and ascension to rule over all of us giving great power to Christ and to all believers.

Our scripture reading says, *“That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, **which is his body**, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.”*

Christ died and was resurrected, and was given great power by God. He truly became our King, not in an earthly sense but in a spiritual one.

We often talk about the last words of someone who has died. Christ’s last words were, *“Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.”*

Think about words. We use words in all sorts of ways over our lifetimes --- e-mails, texts, phone calls, letters (if we still write them), and casual conversations to name a few. Virtually all of that is meaningless in the grand scheme of things and little, if any of it, will be remembered.

But what about our last words? What will they be? They will be an expression of what we want people to remember or of the way that we want to be remembered.

Brian Erickson ⁽¹⁾ said that *“Christ the King Sunday is the last word of the Christian year”*, and indeed it is. Next Sunday we begin the period of Advent, the start of a new year as we await Christ’s second coming.

We have not always celebrated Christ the King Sunday. It was "... first celebrated in 1925, when the world was still reeling from World War I and dictators were laying the foundations for World War II. In Europe and in Mexico, there were great forces of secularization in government, doing all they could to weakened the influence of religion, particularly Christianity. So the church sent a bold statement on the last Sunday of the Christian year, saying, 'Do what you will, but Jesus Christ will have the final word,'" ⁽¹⁾

In our scripture reading Paul says that the church is the body of Christ, and indeed it is. It is a body which can never die, one which will have no last words. William Barclay ⁽²⁾ provides an illustration which he calls "*old and hackneyed*" but which "*perfectly sums up this great truth.*"

He says, "*There is a legend which tells how Jesus went back to heaven after his time on earth. Even in heaven he bore upon him the marks of the Cross. The angels were talking to him and Gabriel said, 'Master, you must have suffered terribly for men down there.' 'I did,' said Jesus. "And,' said Gabriel, "do they all know how you loved them and what you did for them?" "O no," said Jesus, "not yet. Just now only a few people in Palestine know.' 'What have you done,' said Gabriel, "to let everyone know about it?' Jesus said: 'I have asked Peter and James and John and a few others to make it the business of their lives to tell others about me, and the others still others, and yet others, until the farthest man on the widest circle knows what I have done.' Gabriel looked very doubtful, for he knew what poor stuff men were made of. "Yes," he said, "but what if Peter and James and John grow tired? What if the people who come after them forget? What if away down in the twentieth century people just don't tell others about you? Haven't you made any other plans? And Jesus answered: 'I haven't made any other plans. I'm counting on them.' To say that the Church is the Body [of Christ] means that Jesus is counting on us."*

It is up to you, to me, and to all Christians everywhere. But can we do it? Can we rejuvenate a church which seems to some to be dying?

Our Daily Bread (Day 27, introductory edition) told of a 2-year old young boy who was fascinated by a bubbling mud pool in Rotarua, New Zealand. In one location there

were no bubbles and he remarked, “*No batteries?*” His toys required batteries and he even thought that natural phenomena relied on batteries as well.

We Christians make a similar error. The church doesn’t run on batteries. It runs on people. All too often we shrug our shoulders and think that we can’t do anything to grow the church. We can’t live up to the standards of a holy God. It is impossible we say. The result, according to Our Daily Bread, “... *is joyless Christians, hopelessly burdened and defeated.*”

I often stress that each of us must go out and strive to build the church, to do what Christ asked Peter and James and John to do.

Paul asked the believers in Ephesus, and I ask you, to see that the power available to help you live God-honoring lives is the same power that raised Jesus from the dead. It is the same power that allows you, indeed mandates that you make every effort to build the church, to build this congregation.

“The power to live according to God’s standards comes only when we plug into his inexhaustible power.” (Our Daily Bread)

You don’t need batteries. Seek Christ’s face daily and ask him to fill you with the Holy Spirit. Then go out to build the body of Christ. Don’t leave it up to Peter, James and John. If you do your last words may be, “Lord. I didn’t try. I thought that others would do it.”

Amen.

1. Brian Erickson in A Preacher’s Guide to Lectionary Sermon Series, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, KY, 2016
2. William Barclay, The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians, Revised Edition, The Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1976

NOTE: Scripture quotations are from the New International Version of the Bible, 2011