

First Presbyterian Church
Psalm 2:1-6; Matthew 6:25-34, “Who Reigns?”
by Pastor Matt Johnson, 11/10/2024

I selected the scripture passages for this Sunday weeks ago
and I wrote the majority of this sermon before the election was decided,
because I wanted to consider what was important
before the outcome had taken place,
whatever that outcome was going to be.

Heh...that sounded good in theory.

It's a little harder for me to digest now that the outcome has become clear.

Personally, I'm working through some anger following the election.

I'm not going delve into much detail about why;
some of it has to do with pain from personal relationships
I've had going back decades,
some of it has to do with ... fear.

I don't want to operate out of anger or fear as a person of faith,
but sometimes we just feel what we feel,
and that's the way it is in that moment.

So today, I want to maybe not have so many words,
not so much explanation, not so much telling you how to feel.

The question that I pose today applies to all of us, regardless of how we feel:

Who reigns?

Is it the person in the White House?

Is it the person with the most money?

Is it the person at the top of the org chart?

Is it the man with a gun?

Who reigns?

How you answer does not depend on the particulars of your situation,
but on your perspective.

If I accept the perspective of the world organized apart from God,
I might say, "It's obvious who reigns!

The powerful people with titles and money and weapons are in charge.
And the new crop of powerful people have promised
to use their power in ways that make me scared."

It's important to vote, I did vote, and I hope you voted.

When we vote, we need to recognize that we are operating
in systems of the world organized apart from God.

We are participating in worldly power games when we vote.

That doesn't mean elections are wrong or bad.

But we need to recognize that elections
are not the tools of our Creator and Savior Jesus Christ.

**Whether your preferred candidate won or lost,
elections will not result in the arrival of God's love
in our relationships. Think about that.**

On the other hand, if I invite the Spirit to reveal the perspective of God
who calls me beloved,

who made me and holds me as a mother holds her child,

who is my refuge and will not let anyone snatch me away,

I might answer the question "who reigns?" differently.

Who reigns? The Lord alone reigns,
and whatever these powerful people might do,
they cannot take away my identity,
they cannot separate me, you, or our neighbors
from the love of God in Christ.
Nothing can change who we are as a community of the Holy Spirit.

A moment ago I said, “Whether your preferred candidate won or lost,
elections will not result in the arrival of God’s love in our relationships.”
**HOWEVER, the arrival of God’s love in our relationships
could change our elections.**

In Psalm 2, we have a messianic vision from within ancient Israel.
The ancient people of God were very fearful of enemies
and desperately longed to have a king who would
establish God’s promises forever.

Here the Psalmist takes God’s perspective and wonders aloud,
“Why do the nations rage?” They are not raging against Israel,
but against Yahweh, the Creator,
and Yahweh’s anointed king, the Messiah!

Again in v. 4, it is no earthly figure who responds to the taunts of the nations,
but God on the throne in heaven. God rebukes the nations and declared,
“I have installed my king on Zion, my holy mountain.”

If you were an ancient Israelite, fearful of being conquered by other nations,
this Psalm offers a powerful shift of imagination.

Through this Psalm you could enter into a world where *God reigns*
rather than the kings or the earth with their mighty armies.

Who reigns according to Psalm 2? A ruler appointed by birth or by conquest?
The winner of an election?

No – Yahweh and the Yahweh’s Messiah! [Pause]

There was just one problem: The Messiah hadn’t arrived yet.

So the ancient people of God waited and waited and waited ...
and some thought it might not ever happen.

But then that long awaited Messiah finally arrived: Jesus, born of Mary.

Would you expect Jesus after reading Psalm 2?

Oh, he was powerful.

He withstood the might of nations, and overcame death itself.

But his *perspective* was different.

Jesus did not accept the framework offered by human societal structures.

Jesus rejected the need to coerce others or be in control or win elections
or sit on thrones.

Jesus did not tell anyone how they should vote,

but he did give them a vision of what kind of people

the Spirit of God was forming them to be.

Jesus described an alternative kingdom for God's people to inhabit.

Jesus' unveils his vision in the Sermon on the Mount: Matthew 5 – 7.

The passage I read today is from the end of chapter 6.

We might hear what Jesus says and think,

“How naïve. How impractical. How easy for someone
with a lot of security and privilege to say.

This might have worked for Jesus' time,

but I'm dealing with life and death here.”

But Jesus was not out of touch with such realities.

In fact, he and many of his friends were brutally tortured and killed
as a result of them.

While fully aware of how impactful human power structures can be,

Jesus is describing here what it is like to live as though *Jesus is Lord*

even when (or perhaps, **especially** when) we are being told

Caesar kurios, “Caesar is Lord.”

“Do not worry about your life...” Jesus says.

That is fairly all encompassing.

And Jesus means it in the most basic sense possible –
what you will wear, what you will eat.

This is deeper than who wins an election,
these are basic requirements for survival.

How could we not worry about basic requirements for survival?

Because God reigns, and God already knows that you need those things.

Human systems apart from God scrape and claw for control over those things,
but the result is hoarding and oppression and jealousy and overconsumption.

How else can we live?

**“Seek first the reign of God and the righteous relationships of God
and all these things will be given to you as well.”**

When we invite the perspective of Jesus,

what matters most becomes clear and what we truly need will be provided.

Which perspective has the strongest grip on your life?

Do you live from the perspective of the world organized apart from God?

Or do you see with the eyes of God’s Spirit
who abides within you through Jesus Christ?

At any given moment, it’s not an easy question for me to answer, personally.

But I am grateful that God’s Spirit continues to reveal places

where my perspective needs to shift.

What is God’s Spirit revealing to you about your fears, worries, and hopes?

Whose perspective reigns in your life?

How might you make more space in your life for the reign of God?

[PAUSE] A note on this next song, “Lord, Reign in Me”: sing it if you can sing it.

But if you’re not there, hold out your palms, and let it wash over you as a prayer.