**SERMON Revelation 1:4b-8**

Thanksgiving is well established, as a cultural institution in this country. We know it as a day to observe, a milestone in the year. It’s the inauguration of the holiday season…apart from you early-adopters who already have your Christmas decorations up (you know who you are). We are told it is a high holy day for retailers, and a bellwether of national economic health.

This Sunday begins a week for families and wider communities to gather; a day for starting to write up our holiday shopping lists; for watching football; for eating, eating, and eating some more. And for many, it is a time when attention is given to those who live in deep need throughout the year. Thank you, by the way, for all those who donated items and money to the Thanksgiving Baskets for the House of Ruth. But, before it was a noun, “thanksgiving” was a verb. And the difference matters.

Living thankfully is not essentially about feeling thankful, or even being thankful. To live thankfully is to act differently day by day, by day, by day *because* we are compelled by the divine part inside of us. The mysterious part of us, created in the image of God. The Holy Spirit. We are compelled to participate in the generous, abundant life of God-with-us, Emmanuel. Compelled to constantly practice a life of thanks-giving, in community with one another and in community with the God who became one-of-us.

But, today is not just the Sunday before Thanksgiving. It is the Franciscans, followers of Saint Francis of Assisi, who have led the church to designate this last Sunday of the Christian year the *Sunday of Christ the King*. Now, this Sunday in the liturgical calendar celebrates the ultimate leadership of Jesus in our lives. It celebrates that we are a people who recognize that each day must begin with the choice to live out the values and ideals of God’s kin-dom and none other. To choose generosity over stinginess; love over hate; inclusive over exclusive; forgiveness over bitterness. And every time we wake up, we face the choice again…because we have Jesus’ way of living as a guide.

And, as I read our lectionary text from Revelation this week, it struck me that “thanksgiving” – the verb, is a spiritual practice, and one central to the life of a person who hopes to imitate the ways of Jesus, today. Thanksgiving, the verb, is a golden thread, woven through and uniting all we do as Christians. It’s the motivation, the catalyst for kin-dom living. A life continually shaped by the Alpha and Omega, our Higher Power, the Ancient of Days, the Ageless One and Author of Life…who took on flesh. Christ the King Sunday, Thanksgiving Sunday, doesn’t so much end the Christian liturgical calendar…as much as set the tone for what is yet to come.

The book of Revelation is a remarkably early Christian writing, of course it’s got its apocalyptic imagery that can be challenging for contemporary interpreters, but Revelation holds a relevant, if not subversive message for us today. Jesus is “the ruler of the kings of the earth” (1:5a) ‒‒a rule proclaimed already in the present tense. And that can be cause for concern for some who desire control and power *over others* in this world, but…for those who cry “It doesn’t have to be this way?” “We don’t have to fear the ‘other’!” The hope of Jesus’ rule is cause for overwhelming gratitude, as well as a shift in our perspectives.

Our short passage today comprises a complex thanks-giving in three parts.

**#1: Rev 1:5b-6**

In verses 5b-6, there’s a polished doxology: “To the one who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood, who made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father–to him be glory and power forever and always. Amen.”

A doxology is simply a statement that gives praise to God, for who God is and what God has done…here the writer of Revelation is praise God as revealed in Jesus – for loving us and for seeking our freedom, to draw us together as a kingdom, a community, a kin-dom. Arguably the very purpose of Revelation’s apocalyptic story is to empower an alternative community as followers of the Lamb Jesus (Revelation 14:4), and to strengthen people’s witness to God’s reign of love and hope in the face of evil, shame and oppression. And the task of strengthening community and telling that story, falls to us. And we do that through our words, our prayers and songs, and in the actions, we take every day.

Throughout the book, John continually shapes the Christian community as a countercultural community. People of this community are to be different from those who take their lead from the populist leader of the day, or the newest self-help guru, or best-selling author.

God’s people are called a “kingdom of priests” (1:6; a theme that will recur in 5:10 and 20:6). John draws this imagery from the Exodus story in which God liberated Israel from Egypt to be a “priestly kingdom” (Exodus 19:6), and from Isaiah’s description of God’s people as priests in the return from exile in Babylon (Isaiah 61:6).

In the sixteenth century, reformer Martin Luther drew his doctrine of the priesthood of all the baptized from this very idea from in Revelation, and in 1 Peter 2:5 and 2:9. Luther’s notion that “we are all priests” (Babylonian Captivity of the Churches) therefore became a central tenet for Protestants. In the UCC, all four of our predecessor denominations arose from the tradition of the Protestant Reformers, who affirmed the priesthood of all believers. Declaring that every one of you is a minister.

There is no special class of people who mediate the knowledge, presence, and forgiveness of Christ, you each have the right and authority to read, interpret, and apply the ways of Jesus in your own life, and in a world that desperately needs to see hope, love, joy and peace.

**#2: Rev 1:7**

In verse 7 we hear, the second part of John’s thanks-giving, in the form of a prophetic word concerning the coming of Jesus: “Look he is coming with the clouds! Every eye will see him, including those who pierced him, and all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of him. This is so. Amen”

“Coming” (1:7) – like the “rule” of Jesus proclaimed in verse 5, is in the present tense, suggesting a coming already underway. Now, the traditional view has been to understand this “coming” as primarily referring to Jesus’ supposed future “second coming” (a term that’s never actually used in Revelation or anywhere in the Bible!).

Recent scholars emphasize Jesus’ sacramental coming. An act that begins holy significance, grace and promise. That is God’s crashing into our every day, the glimpse of God’s kingdom here and now. It’s an incredibly hopeful claim, and ought not to fill us with dread or fear. “Look God is coming…” here and now, in each one our lives, and in our community of faith. And we give thanks because we get to not just sit on the sidelines and watch these God-moments, these kingdom-glimpses…we have been invited by our Creator, to participate in them. To be the hope in someone else’s life, to be the person who rallies support for those who are discriminated against, who listens deeply to someone who is lonely, who is present with one who mourns, who collects and packs food and Christmas gifts for those struggling financially. Give thanks, for you get to be a part of something greater than yourself, you are the conduit for Christ’s coming today!

**#3: Rev 1:8**

Our passage then closes with a ‘word-of-God’ in direct speech: “‘I am the Alpha and the Omega,’ says the Lord God, ‘the one who is and was and is coming, the Almighty’.” This is third and final part of John’s thanks-giving.

Only twice does God speak directly in Revelation (1:8 and 21:5-7). The statement, “I am the Alpha and Omega” uses the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet to underscore God’s all-encompassing presence, from A to Z. The Alpha and Omega of Revelation 1:8 is a wonderful image with which to end the current liturgical year and start another.

The fact is that through 2020, through 2021, and into 2022, God’s presence has never left us. God’s presence is everywhere, all the time. A vast, boundless, oneness. It’s ok to admit if this elicits some complicated feelings inside of you. The last 2 years have been no joke. But, God is big enough to handle your disappointments, your fears and your anger. So, let the “Alpha and Omega” have it! Tell God how you feel as you enter Advent this year. Tell God what it is like living in flesh, today…There is no place you can go, no words that you can say, no thoughts you can have, that would place you outside of God’s presence. For God-with-us, the Emmanuel…is One who loves you and desires your freedom.

So, I invite you, today and this week to give thanks. Make thanks-giving a verb again, as we enter the season of expectancy, the season of Advent. You are made a kin-dom, a beloved community, priesthood of all believers, who are called to participate in the daily coming of Christ with the holy, powerful and loving Alpha and Omega. Give thanks!