

The Kin-dom of Christ

A Message shared with the congregation of St. Andrew's United Church

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by Alison Warner-Smith

Today is "Reign of Christ Sunday," the last Sunday of the Christian liturgical calendar. Next Sunday, we'll begin this cycle again as we start a new year with the anticipation of the birth of the Christ-child through story and song and in our daily lives. Today, the entire church year has almost played out and we have been leading to this day. We have been following events and stories celebrating the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. It's like a sports season being played out for the finals where a champion will be determined. Just a few short weeks ago, the members of the Houston Astros streamed out of the dugout as they jumped on each other, celebrating their World Series of baseball championship.

For us here in the church, the season is almost over, and you might say that today is the finals. Although you likely won't see anyone running from the pews to tackle the worship leader in celebration (at least, I hope not!), I would hope it would be in the mood of celebration – today is the championship day in the church year. You might be thinking to yourself, "Well what about Easter? Isn't Easter the most special day in the church year?" If you are thinking that, you have a point. And then others might say, "And then there is Christmas. Isn't that also a very special day in our church year?" If you are thinking that, you also have a point. And of course, today we celebrate St. Andrew's Day, another very important day in the life of our church. These are truly special days, but the way that the **church** calendar is designed leads to this day, the final day in our year. And this day is also a very special one to consider because by the end of this service the church calendar will have come full circle.

It begins with Advent where we prepare for the birth of Jesus and the celebration of his birth at Christmas. And then his appearances – to the wise men, at the wedding, in the transfiguration at Epiphany. And then he sets his face toward Jerusalem, and we are plunged into the days of Lent, suffering, sacrifice and self-denial, the betrayal and death of holy week, but finally to the miracle of resurrection at Easter. And then the prayer, over 50 days, for the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost. And then the church moves through ordinary time, the long season of green which we are finishing today, the conclusion. You can see it in the imagery of the Book of Revelation, or even in the way our hymnal is ordered. And at the end of the year, we deal with death and eternal life, the communion of the saints, all leading up to today's Reign of Christ Sunday, a day which is all about the kingship, or kin-ship, of Christ.

The Kin-dom of God, as Jesus referred to it, meant God's will on Earth. It meant a realm of egalitarianism and justice, where all experienced fullness of life, and where God's love and compassion reigned. Jesus understood the Kin-dom of God to be a present reality, a reality which could be actualized if people would only see it and live it. God's Kin-dom was present and made visible wherever right relationships were being established, wherever justice and compassion prevailed.

As Christians, we may not have a big shiny trophy to lift high as we celebrate a sports championship, but we have something much better. We have something far more

precious and enduring than a shiny piece of metal or plastic. The victory on this day of the finals is to know that Christ has claimed us as his own and no power in this world can break that relationship.

I believe that walking the way of Jesus and living into fullness the Kingdom of God requires a conversion of the heart. It requires the intentional practice of putting one's beliefs into action. At St. Andrew's, we do that. We live out our mission throughout the year, helping those who need love, compassion, respect, and justice. And we pray every week as Jesus taught us, "Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done, on Earth as it is in Heaven" (Matthew 6:10). Amen.