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READINGS:

Psalm 110:1-7

¹ Of David. A Psalm. The LORD says to my lord, "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool." ² The LORD sends out from Zion your mighty scepter. Rule in the midst of your foes. ³ Your people will offer themselves willingly on the day you lead your forces on the holy mountains. From the womb of the morning, like dew, your youth will come to you. ⁴ The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind, "You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek." ⁵ The Lord is at your right hand; he will shatter kings on the day of his wrath. ⁶ He will execute judgment among the nations, filling them with corpses; he will shatter heads over the wide earth. ⁷ He will drink from the stream by the path; therefore he will lift up his head.

Luke 17:20-35

²⁰ ¶ Once Jesus was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God was coming, and he answered, "The kingdom of God is not coming with things that can be observed; ²¹ nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There it is!' For, in fact, the kingdom of God is among you." ²² ¶ Then he said to the disciples, "The days are coming when you will long to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and you will not see it. ²³ They will say to you, 'Look there!' or 'Look here!' Do not go, do not set off in pursuit. ²⁴ For as the lightning flashes and lights up the sky from one side to the other, so will the Son of Man be in his day. ²⁵ But first he must endure much suffering and be rejected by this generation. ²⁶ Just as it was in the days of Noah, so too it will be in the days of the Son of Man. ²⁷ They were eating and drinking, and marrying and being given in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed all of them. ²⁸ Likewise, just as it was in the days of Lot: they were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building, ²⁹ but on the day that Lot left Sodom, it rained fire and sulfur from heaven and destroyed all of them ³⁰ -- it will be like that on the day that the Son of Man is revealed. ³¹ On that day, anyone on the housetop who has belongings in the house must not come down to take them away; and likewise anyone in the field must not turn back. ³² Remember Lot's wife. ³³ Those who try to make their life secure will lose it, but those who lose their life will keep it. ³⁴ I tell you, on that night there will be two in one bed; one will be taken and the other left. ³⁵ There will be two women grinding meal together; one will be taken and the other left."

Jesus is indeed in heaven, seated on his throne at the right hand of God...Amen?

Jesus is the messiah, the Christ, the Son of Man and the Son of God...Amen?

The Christ is the messiah, the anointed one of God. But what does it mean to be the Christ? What does it mean for Jesus to be the messiah, the anointed one of God? In our earlier reading of Psalm 110, the psalmist delivered an oracle that would aptly apply to Jesus centuries later. In fact, Psalm 110:1 is one of the most often quoted passages in the New Testament by being alluded to, or directly cited, around 16 times! In the Psalm 110 passage we learn of what was expected in the coming messiah. Verse two prophesizes that this messiah figure will “*rule in the midst of [his] foes*” and verse one explains that he will “*sit at [God’s] right hand until [he] makes [his] enemies [his] footstool.*” The imagery here is of a priestly king who rules over his enemies with religious and political power. Indeed, the imagery later turns to the harsh judgment of other kings and nations when God “*will shatter kings on the day of his wrath*” in verse 5 and “*execute judgment among the nations*” in verse 6. So what we have here in Psalm 110 is an oracle of a coming king who is anointed by God and will sit at his right hand and execute his judgment among his enemies, which include both kings and nations.

But who are Christ's enemies? It is difficult to tell from this prophesy but we learn from the New Testament that Judas is among them. Yet who else has betrayed the Lord, who may Jesus count as an enemy in that Day of Judgment? Is it possible that any of us could be considered Jesus' enemy because of the things we do or don't do, or because of the things we think or believe, or what about denying Jesus in some way as Peter did? Have you ever denied Jesus? As the prophesy states, those who are counted as Jesus' enemies will be made into a footstool for Christ.

However, of central interest to our study today is how the Psalm portrays this coming priestly and anointed ruler as a heavenly religious and political figure who is an exalted king over all the nations. We don't normally think of Jesus as a political figure but in fact that is how the Romans and the priestly class of Israel saw him. You may recall that Pilate had, "*King of the Jews*" (Mark 15:26) inscribed above Jesus' cross. Of course some of the Jews denied that Jesus was their king because, after all, what king would be crucified next to two criminals? This idea of Jesus' political status among the Romans and the Jews is further explained in Mark 14:48 where Jesus said to those who were about to arrest him, "*Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest me as though I were a bandit?*" The word for "bandit" in Greek is *ληστής* which is probably better translated as "insurrectionist" or "revolutionary." But the Jews were not expecting

a messiah that had Jesus' political vision. They were expecting a Christ who was going to overthrow the Romans just like the Maccabean revolt a few centuries earlier. This is emphasized in John 18:40 when they had the choice between Jesus and Barabbas: *"They shouted in reply, "Not this man, but Barabbas!" Now Barabbas was a ληστής.*" In other words, he was a revolutionary or an insurrectionist. Barabbas was a type of revolutionary that wanted a kingdom of power that was purchased with the blood of soldiers and innocent civilians. This type of thinking was, and still is, standard among many nations and kingdoms today.

If the insurrectionist politics of Barabbas is war and power, what then are the revolutionary politics of the messiah, the anointed one, the Christ? What was so revolutionary about Jesus that he was crucified as a king? Well, we learn from the Sermon on the Mount that Jesus was trying to establish a new kingdom of peace. He tells the crowd in Matthew 5:9-10 that *"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."* Among some of the other things, Jesus also instructs his followers that: *"If anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also"* (5:38), *"Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you"* (5:42), *"Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you"* (5:44). Of course these things are difficult

to do, especially for cultures that honor those who take lives instead of save them, or who are willing to do anything evil against a fellow human because of their hate, or who are willing to ignore the poor in their own country so that others may continue to get rich. A question that has been floating around in my mind since the start of last fall is: should we as Christians be counter-cultural?

Some will say though that this revolutionary kingdom of peace, these revolutionary politics, are going to come when Jesus returns so we need not worry about them right now. But this reasoning is a scapegoat for all those who truly do not grasp what Jesus is saying. In John 14:27 Jesus says to his followers, *“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives”* and in John 20:19, 21, and 26, Jesus says after he had been raised from the dead, *“Peace be with you.”* Returning to the Sermon on the Mount we notice in the last section of the sermon that Jesus says: *“Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock”* (7:24). You see, these are not just some teachings that we believe and don’t act on; they are teachings we believe and should follow.

Now if Jesus were a politician in our American culture, he might be considered a “liberal.” [Now that needs some qualification as I don’t want to step on too many toes today. ☺] If we look at Jesus’ life we see that he spent most of his time ministering to the marginalized and poor people in society. He rejected

those who were rich and he turned his cheek against the war and violence that plagued his region. Yet, even our most liberal of politicians fail at this task because they have a kingdom of the world on their minds and hearts instead of a kingdom of heaven. But we Christians can be counter-cultural by our actions. And it is only by our actions that Jesus' revolutionary kingdom will be truly fulfilled.

Congregation I have a motto for you that many Christians in this country do not understand, which to me is strangely ironic given the second earliest founding of this American nation at Plymouth Rock. That motto is this: *"You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven"* (Matthew 5:14-16). The other truth that many Christians also don't seem to understand or believe concerns what we heard in our second reading today. Contrary to what many Christians think, Jesus says in Luke 17:21, *"For, in fact, the kingdom of God is among you."* That is, the kingdom of God is here—now. And the content of the parable and prophecy that follows in verses 22-37 makes perfect sense given what we have just talked about. Some will be left behind in Jesus' future heavenly reign

because they failed to recognize the kingdom they live in now on earth. They failed to do things that Jesus asked of them.

Some will then ask, what did Jesus command us to do? I would respond if you don't comprehend the Sermon on the Mount as literally being what Jesus calls us to do, then perhaps you should read Matthew 25:31-46. In this teaching Jesus tells us that our actions speak for our faith. He will say to those followers who did what he asked of them, *"Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me"* (Matthew 25:34-36). Our second reading in Luke should be understood in the context of what Jesus then concludes in Matthew 25:45-46, *"Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it [that is, feed the hungry, take care of the sick, etc.] to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.' And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."*

While I do not claim to know what each person must do individually to inherit salvation, I do know that as an entire Christian church, not just this congregation, we could be doing more of the things Jesus entreated us to do. Again, have you ever denied Jesus? There are poor and sick people throughout

this country. And ‘The Politics of The Christ’ knows no party affiliation such as republican or democrat, it has no president of one solitary country but rather has a king of all nations. ‘The Politics of the Christ’ does not have enemies in nations such as Iraq or Afghanistan but rather has enemies in all those who do not do what he commanded all of his followers to do. Barabbas wanted to shed the blood of his enemies to establish his kingdom of power that never came. On the other hand, Jesus shed his own blood for his followers in a kingdom of peace that is among us right now.

This emphasis on action may seem a little confusing in our western culture because we are a Christian culture that sometimes emphasizes “faith” over “works.” Not surprisingly, how many times do we quote Paul and do not quote James? I find it fascinating that the book of James was probably written after Paul and was attributed in tradition to James, the brother of Jesus. What he says does, at times, differ from Paul’s message. If the tradition is accurate that this book was written by close followers of James, the brother of Jesus, it gives us an interesting look into what Jesus taught; because as you know, Paul was not there during Jesus’ ministry but was persecuting his church. One popular saying that is emphasized all the time in the Pauline corpus comes from Romans 10:9-10, *“Because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For one believes with the heart and so is*

justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved.” While this is true of faith in general, I think James gets more to the point of the action of faith when he says in 1:22, *“But be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves.”* This phrase, as you may recall, echoes that of Jesus in Matthew 7:24. James also goes on to say: *“What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you?”* (2:14) and *“So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead. But someone will say, “You have faith and I have works.” Show me your faith apart from your works, and I by my works will show you my faith.”* (2:17-18).

Brothers and Sisters, the point is this: I don’t really think it is enough to just be baptized or just come to church every Sunday to sit and listen to someone preach. While I obviously don’t know exactly what will “earn” a place in heaven, I do know that Jesus is very clear in our calling to serve the community by helping those less fortunate than us. I also know that ‘The Politics of The Christ’ does not distinguish between American and Iraqi, White and Black, or even Church of Christ and United Church of Christ. What ‘The Politics of The Christ’ does distinguish however is: those who are poor versus those who are rich, those who turn the other cheek versus those who go to war, those who are hungry right now versus those who will go and have a sumptuous feast after services...those who are doers of the word versus those who are hearers. While I can’t say who among us

has not adequately filled this task I can tell you without hesitation that I have not. I have not been revolutionary enough in trying to spread God's kingdom on earth. It is true that over the past two years my service to this congregation has included:

- Creating a young adult ministry and teaching Bible study almost every Sunday morning.
- Organizing devotionals and fellowship activities such as trips to the movies, bowling, and miniature golfing.
- Celebrating Earth Day and creating a more sustainable church environment by the planting of vegetables and fruit trees.
- And finally severing in whatever capacity I can on Sunday mornings to preside over communion, to read scripture, or offer prayer.

While all of these things are good and I was glad to do them, I know they were not all that I could have done or should have done for this congregation and especially the surrounding community. Maybe you find yourself like I do now with some regrets about things you could have and should have done. Take heart then brothers and sisters as it is never too late to do the things you could do and should do.

I have inscribed on the inside of my wedding ring "One Lifetime." The phrase is borrowed from the Phantom of the Opera that says in one of its songs, "One Love, One Lifetime." Besides being reminded of my beautiful wife and

wonderful marriage, I look at it often and try to think of how I can make this one life that I have on earth count—just to make this world a little bit better. The phrase often reminds me of Ephesians 4:5 that says, “One Lord, one faith, one baptism.” I am constantly reminding myself that it was one Lord’s sacrifice that saved me on the cross, and saves me still—not many presidents or kings. It is one faith by which we should all do the things that we believe and were taught by Jesus to do—and inevitably one faith that is sometimes not strong enough to do those things that we ought to do. It is one baptism that put me into Christ that I may serve him and his present kingdom, and through which I also remember my confession and my oath before him when I buried my old self in the water. So I press on now to a new chapter in my life where hopefully through God’s grace and mercy I can be a better servant of his kingdom. But I want you all to know that it does not take a change in physical location to start over. Day after day we make the choices in life that will echo in eternity.

So “*I press on toward the goal*” (Philippians 3:14) of becoming more revolutionary, to try to enact ‘The Politics of The Christ.’ As Luke 12:48 explains, “*From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required; and from the one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded.*” The church and the world is what we make of it, and Jesus has left it in our care! God has left it to us to spread his kingdom by non-violent and peaceable action so that

we can stand up to the horrible atrocities of the world. How will we help the poor? How will we help the sick? How will we stand in the face of injustice, maltreatment, and disenfranchisement that nations around the world, including this one, produce on their subjects? How will we spread the message of Christ to sinners? Perhaps by being counter-cultural? Maybe, after all, that is the true definition of being revolutionary? Jesus was certainly counter-cultural but he did not have to leave his own culture to prove it. And neither do we! In our own backyard, so-to-speak, is a nation filled with the poor, the sick, the lonely, the disenfranchised, the maltreated, and, most importantly—the lost. Have you ever denied Jesus? So, my peace I give to you, my peace I leave with you in the following statement and prayer:

“Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:16).

Prayer: Most holy God, fill this land with your glory. Set our hearts on fire so that we may help to flood the nations with grace and mercy as Jesus taught us. Help us to send forth your word and help us to let our lights shine into the darkness. Let your kingdom be on earth, as it is in heaven. Its in your sons’ precious name that we pray and ask these things. Amen!