

Immanuel United Church
Nov 21st, 2021
The Reign of Christ Sunday

Welcome

“Pope Pius XI is established Christ the King Sunday in 1925 to counter what he regarded as the destructive forces of facism and the totalitarian claims of Nazi ideologies.” (Nadia Bolz-Weber)

On this last Sunday before Advent begins, Christian Churches in the world hold it as the Reign of Christ Sunday.

Who is Jesus? Who is the Christ we follow?

Call to Worship:

God is in this place.

Therefore we will not fear.

We are not alone.

With God on our side, we have faith.

We place our lives in God’s hands, today and every day.

Prayer:

God, we give you thanks for guiding with compassion and sensitivity.

For the sake of this confusing, messyness of the world, we turn to you as the quiet centre of peace, wise and concerned for your people.

May all your beloved ones experience the wonder of blessed wholeness.

Let your light shine into obscured places.

Let hope echo into people’s hearts.

Let possibility unfold into new life.

In the name of the Reigning Christ, we pray. Amen.

Lighting the Christ Candle, as we pray for:

Flood victims

Generous volunteers

Encouragement

Courage

Gratitude

British Columbia

Strength for the journey
Energy
Hope
Listening to the Spirit

Hymn: VU 333 *Love Divine, All Loves Excelling*

Scripture: John 18:33-37

Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?"

Jesus answered, "Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?"

Pilate replied, "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?"

Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here."

Pilate asked him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice."

The Choir Anthem: *Come Walk With Me*

Reflection: Christ on the Chemainus Road

Before moving to Winnipeg, my family lived in a town that was built on a steep hill, Ladysmith. The town of Chemainus, built in a river valley, is about a 15-minute drive from Ladysmith, and the United Church in Chemainus was where I worked. This part of Vancouver Island, south of Nanaimo and north of Duncan, is where we lived, loved and worked.

I particularly enjoyed the drive to Chemainus. The best part of it is when you turn this one corner. I knew exactly when the corner appeared and what I would see after I turned. In all four seasons, the bottom of the trees and rocks on the edge of the narrow road were covered with a large delicate moss that was a popping neon-lime colour. I loved the glory of God in that beautiful show of nature.

My heart sank when I saw a Facebook post which showed the road to Chemainus was swamped – underwater, in parts. Some cars had to still pass this road which had turned so dangerous. Soon, I was reading more news, articles and seeing pictures and videos about what happened in BC. Huge rain, and a windstorm, bad enough to be declared a state of emergency. All roads and highways between the Lower Mainland and the rest of Canada were closed. Damaged, or completely washed out, bridges and highways would take months to repair. Railroad traffic to and from the rest of the country was suspended. In one city the water treatment had to be taken off-line, and there was no water available in people's homes. Thousands of people have been evacuated from entire cities; thousands of people were trapped between slides.

As I speak of these tragedies, I find my colleague Jennifer Henry's words of prayer helpful: "Feeling for all the BC folks struggling with another state of emergency. [We pray] for those who experienced trauma earlier this year and to whom it is returning. For those cut off from basic necessities and medications. For those separated from loved ones. For those feeling afraid. For those who have died, likely more than the one soul now grieved by family and friends. Stay strong, dear ones."

This past weekend, I was asked to open a meeting with prayer and offer the land acknowledgement. Thinking deeply about it, I decided to ask people the following questions, rather than simply writing down on their zoom chat box which and whose territory they live in. (Show the picture of *Our Lives Are In the Land* by the Metis artist, Christie Belcourt): "The harm of climate change affects the lives of all of us, in Canada, the whole of this American continent, around the globe. It is no longer thought to be something that affects only the 'vulnerable' population or people in the Third World where it is hotter and more humid, or in the north of the globe where permanent glaciers are melting. Climate change affects a very immediate part of our lives, the lives of all of us. We think especially of the Indigenous communities, peoples and nations whose traditional land we live on.

From the knowledge you have so far, could you name negative impacts of climate change on culture and cultural rights of Indigenous people, especially in your region, specifically how it affects the lives and the land of First Peoples?

Also, could you name some potential benefits of the culture and cultural rights of Indigenous people that would enhance responses to climate change, especially in your region?"

To prepare this land acknowledgement, I was reading an article I found on-line, *Cultural Rights of First Nations and Climate Change*, published by the British Columbia

Assembly of First Nations. (May 2020) (https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/CulturalRights/Call_ClimateChange/BCAFN.pdf)

Among many important learnings, I would like to share two points from the article:

“Evacuation orders from fires and floods force First Nations to move away from their territories, often without culturally appropriate assistance and support, and especially impact Elders, women and those with special needs.”

“There are many examples in BC where First Nations have been using their Indigenous knowledge to mitigate and adapt to climate change, although there is no specific, dedicated effort or funding from the Provincial or Federal Governments to enable all First Nations to undertake climate change mitigation or adaptation actions using culture and cultural resources. ...

Indigenous self-governance and land rights are essential to upholding cultural rights and responding to climate change. The Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services Report and other sources show that Indigenous peoples with secured land and water rights are coincided with areas of enhanced biodiversity, conserved forest and marine areas, carbon sequestration, and markers of biological health.”

Scientists and other experts have long since predicted how climate change would impact the region where we live. And they are proven devastatingly accurate, each year. Forest fires, historic flooding and melting glaciers are just some of the examples of how Canadians have experienced the impacts of a changing climate and the extreme, unpredictable weather patterns that come along with it. For the West, (Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, B.C.) the key risks are wildfires, flooding, droughts, changes to water supply and quality. Changing rain patterns make droughts more frequent and more intense across the southern Prairie region in summer. That leads to less water in the rivers during the summer months, which could have a big impact on the agricultural industries based here, despite the fact that the growing season itself will likely get longer as a result of fewer days with frost.

As many of you have also learned this past week, one of the areas most affected by flooding, Abbotsford, was originally the Sumas Lake, the biggest fresh-water wetlands in all of BC, and it was drained to make some of the best farmland. The draining of the lake destroyed the only way of life the local Sumas Band of the Sto:lo Nation ever knew in 1923-24. Ned, a former chief of the Sumas band, was interviewed by the Vancouver

Sun in 2013, and he said, "They took the lake away and we never got one inch of it. I don't know how the people (Sumas) survived way back then."

The rampant wildfires of the past few years crumpled the holding power of the soil, so when the heavy rain fell, it was unstoppable. The water reappeared and tried to come back to what it was once part of, the disappeared lake.

The reason why I am sharing this painful news and findings on this Reign of Christ, Christ the King Sunday is that Christian doctrines and traditional theologies about Jesus the Christ contributed to what has caused and now speeds current and future climate change woes. Historically, Christianity promoted the dualism of spirit and flesh, and taught the superiority of spirit, rationality or reason over flesh and body, and their right to control and govern what is inferior and manipulatable. It gave theological permission and a foundation that justified the rights to use, explore, even exploit what is considered to be just flesh, body not spirit, which is women, the land, nature, the earth.

On this last Sunday before Advent starts, the Reign of Christ, Christ the King Sunday, that celebrates the final Sunday before we return to the Genesis of the Gospel, the Advent, I want us to ask who Jesus is, what it means that we follow Jesus, as we lament, confess and faithfully respond to climate change and its effect and hurt to all peoples on this Turtle Island and on the earth.

In our Gospels, we do not only tell the story of Jesus' ministry and death. We also sing a song of faith in which we prayerfully wait for, patiently prepare for and courageously celebrate the birth of Jesus, the resurrection of Christ, with our saints and ancestors of faith in the world. If Christ has a colour, I believe they would show the bright lime colour of the moss whose beauty and delicacy surprised and created awe in the hearts of many drivers and passersby. This week, may Christ's cry and blessings for the wholeness of the earth, relevant to today, challenge us and comfort us as we start surviving climate change, and strive to mitigate it for the well-being of all of us, on the earth.

Hymn: VU 642 Be Thou My Vision V. 1, 2, 3, 4

Offering:

Hymn: VU 540 Grant Us, God, the Grace

Prayer:

Life is full of sorrow, full of joy.

**May you bless these gifts we offer, O God,
As dances of joy amidst sorrow,
as shouts of thanksgiving amidst sacrifice,
as songs of celebration amidst tragedy,
as signs of Jesus embodied amidst us all
from cross to birth, from wilderness to resurrection. Amen.**

Prayers of the People (Moderator Richard Bott)

There is so much beauty from sea to sky,
on roads that twist and turn
along the sides of mountains,
where one can look down from dizzying heights
into valleys that are lush and green,
or into ocean waters, salty, and full of life;
and look up to see mountain peaks
that have stood, sturdy, far longer
than humankind has walked your earth, God!

But when the rains come down,
hard and fast,
turning the soil into liquid slurry,
tonnes upon tonnes of rock and mud will move
with an unimaginable force,
and the rivers rise, flooding more than the plains,
sweeping over and away everything in its path.

Nothing human-made can stand
in the face of that force,
God of all creation.

That is what the people of British Columbia
have been facing, these past days,
with loss of life;
with communities cut off from each other,
some lacking power,
some in places already touched by fire
this season.

We pray for those who have died or been injured,

and all those who are grieving;
we pray for the crews who are out,
trying to figure out how to clear the way,
safely;
we pray for those who are in need,
and those who are wondering, "What next?!";
and we pray that we would come together
as this community of Canada,
to offer what support is needed.

And, God, we pray that the rains would quiet,
to their normal, seasonal, flow;
that the land would remain sturdy,
that we would be held by its beauty,
once again.

Amen.

Hymn: VU 375 *Spirit, Spirit of Gentleness*

Benediction:

Be patient, beloved ones,
and let your hearts be strong,
for the blossom of Love Incarnate is here.
May God's blessing be with us all. Amen.