

*Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne,<sup>5</sup> and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.*

*To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood,<sup>6</sup> and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.*

<sup>7</sup> *Look, he is coming with the clouds,  
and every eye will see him,  
even those who pierced him;  
and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him.  
So shall it be! Amen.*

<sup>8</sup> *“I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.” (Revelation 1:4b-8)*

### **Christ is the King!**

Today is the last Sunday of the church year. Next Sunday will be the first Sunday of Advent which is the beginning of the new church year, even though the calendar year still has more than a month left to run. Before we get out our Advent wreath and put up our Christmas tree, we end the church year with a Sunday called Christ the King. Now, the name is pretty self-explanatory, right? All the readings and hymns today remind us that Jesus is our true king. But why do we call him that? We Americans haven't had a king for almost 240 years. Yet, throughout all that history, Christians in America never stopped calling Jesus “Lord” and “king.” We never started calling him, “Jesus our President.” At the same time, we never went the other way either. We don't call him our emperor. “King” just feels right. So today, we want to listen to what the Apostle John tells us about Jesus so we can reaffirm that truth: **Christ is the King!**

#### **I.**

In fact, John says, **He is the ruler of the kings of the earth.** Jesus is in charge right now. That can be hard for us to see sometimes. Over the last couple weeks, more than 400 people were killed by terrorists, culminating in those attacks in Paris. Those people hate us and our faith. Where is God in all this? If Jesus is in charge, how can he let this happen? That's a tough question for us. In times of war or disaster, our enemies love to throw it in our faces. But the truth is, we think about it ourselves. And we ask, “Why, God? What are you doing?” The hard truth is that God doesn't tell us why. He doesn't pull back the curtain so we can see how these attacks and the hatred for our faith fit into his plan, except in a very general way: by pointing out who he is really is and what his goal is for this planet.

John tells us God is giving us grace and peace. He is working to calm our hearts in a troubled world and to assure us that he will do all that we need and more, just because he loves us. How does he show us that today? First of all, by reminding us who he is. Our reading offers us grace and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come. God was always there and he always will be there. Before the universe began, there was only God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He conceived of this world and spoke it into existence. That same God will still be here when you and I die. He'll still be here when the heavens roll up like a scroll and the earth as we know it is consumed by fire. That is the God who is in control. You and I can only see as much as we have known and experienced. Even if we become Ph.D.'s in history or astronomy or physics, what we can truly know of this universe is nothing compared to all that's out there. So we really can't know what the end result of last week's events will be. But God knows. He can see it all and he is in charge today.

But an almighty, eternal all-knowing God could be pretty scary if all he did was stand up there and thunder at us. But he does more. He sends “**the seven spirits**” who are “**before his throne.**” Who are they? Angels? No. This is an unusual way to say it, but John clearly is thinking of the Holy Spirit. The most likely reason for calling him the seven spirits is that in the book of Isaiah when he speaks of the Holy Spirit coming on Jesus, he calls him by seven terms, “the spirit of wisdom and understanding, of counsel and power” and so on. What matters here is that the Spirit who is before the throne is the way that you and I get the grace and peace

God wants us to have. He works in the gospel. He comes to us in our baptism and in communion. He comes to us when we hear about Jesus and he eases our struggle and gives us the grace to trust in God even when the world is full of turmoil and violence.

He does that through Jesus. John calls Jesus, “**the faithful witness.**” Christ spent three years preaching the good news. John calls him “**the firstborn from the dead.**” Jesus died and he rose. When he rose, he opened the door that we will walk through when we rise from the dead. John says that he is “**the ruler of the kings of the earth.**” That’s our point today: Jesus really is in charge. He is the king over every other king. Later in Revelation John will call him the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. All that happens here is in his hand. That’s true because he is the Son of God, one with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

And it’s true because he is our Savior. John says, “**To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.**” There was never a greater example of love than when Jesus stayed on the cross and paid for our sins. Now, many people would disagree with me. Ten of thousands of people in the history of this world have died so that others will live. Right now, American service men and women risk their lives every day to keep us safe, as do police officers and firemen. But Jesus did more than any of those dedicated people ever could. He didn’t just die for us. He suffered hell itself for us. He paid all that was owed by every human being who will ever be born. He suffered and died and rose and he did take our sins away. They are erased from God’s record book forever.

Then he went even further: he took us weak sinners who question his love and the way he controls the world, who forget what he commands us, who sin every day even though we know better – he took us and made us his kingdom. He is our king. And he made us priests of God the Father. In the Old Testament, a priest was someone who could go to God for you. You couldn’t go. You couldn’t come into the temple and offer your own sacrifices. A priest had to approach God for you. But now, you can walk right in to speak to God in heaven. Jesus has made every Christian a priest.

So why does he let those terrible things happen? The only answer that he gives us is that he is controlling everything for the good of his Church, the good of his kingdom, his priests. He promises that he will bring us home when the time is right. Until that day, he will stand next to us and decide what pains we have to face and which ones he will block. Most of the things he spares us, we never even know about. But he is control. He calls us to trust him. He even tells us that faith is being sure of things we can’t see. It’s easy to trust when life is good. But faith clings to him when life hurts. Faith knows him when we can’t understand what he’s doing. Faith trusts his promise even when his word is being drowned out by terrorists and unbelievers and skeptics.

How can our faith do that? By remembering who we trust: the Son of God who came into this world out of pure love for you and me. The Savior who laid down his life to set us free from all sin and then rose to promise us a new a better life to come. When life makes no sense, God doesn’t call us to figure it out. God doesn’t call us to read his mind. God doesn’t give us a red phone that we can use to question his choices. God points us back to the cross and the empty tomb and the promises he made there. He calls us to drink deep of his gospel and he sends the Spirit before his throne to strengthen us so that we trust in him. When we get to heaven, we will see that he did indeed do all things for our good.

## II.

That is his promise. Even though we don’t see it now, we will. That’s the second part of what John assures us of today. That promise is vital as we wrestle with the weakness of our faith and the hardness of what we see around us. **Christ is the King! He is the one who is coming in the clouds.**

I’ve imagined that coming many times. I think it started when I was in sixth grade at a Lutheran elementary school. One spring day, we were out at recess and there were all these really cool clouds and the sun was shining through them. One of the eighth graders turned to me and said, “That’s how I imagine Judgment Day.” I had to stop and think about that. And I haven’t stopped for forty years. Jesus will come in the clouds. What will that look like? I don’t know, although I do have a picture in my mind. In recent years, that picture has taken on a new dimension. As I’ve preached and taught from the Old Testament, I’ve started to notice how many times the prophets say that God rides on the storm clouds. Of course, they pictured him in heaven, above the clouds. And I don’t think it’s an accident that several times the New Testament speaks of Jesus coming on the clouds. It’s a statement of who he is: the Son of God.

John says, **“Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him.”** Every eye will see him. I once had a student in catechism class ask me where Jesus would be so that we could all see him. I started to say, “Well up in the air, of course.” Then I realized how inadequate that answer is. The moon is up, relative to us, right? But we can’t see it right now because it’s on the other side of the earth. The people in China can’t see the sun right now because it’s on this side of the earth. There simply is no place anywhere in the universe that a person can be so that everyone on every side of this planet can see him at the same time. But we will all see Jesus! How? All I could tell that catechism class student is that Jesus has to figure it out, not me.

But I also told him that this statement shows that when he comes, the world as we know it, is over. He will do things that simply cannot be done. He will raise the dead. He will gather all those who ever lived, even those who were eaten by sharks and burned to dust centuries ago. And he will gather all them to one place on earth. That same student asked me if there are enough molecules on earth for all people who have ever lived to get their bodies back. Thankfully, he didn’t ask me how ten billion people or more could gather in one place. But the answer would’ve been the same to both questions: Jesus has to figure it out, not me.

But he will gather us all and judge the world. And he will do it all in the blink of an eye. John tells us that even those who crucified him will see him. He tells us that all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him. Many people who don’t know the Bible think that the Old Testament is the law part and the New Testament is the gospel part. In fact, they’ll contrast the judgmental, angry Old Testament God with the New Testament God of love. Well, did you notice that John sees both the God of love and the God of judgment here? Why will all the peoples of the earth mourn? Because Jesus will send most of them to hell. Now, most of the time, it is true that the New Testament speaks of Judgment Day as a good day and most of the time, the Old Testament speaks of it as a scary day. But that’s because of who God is talking to. Whenever God is talking to people who don’t listen, who insist on sinning, who reject him and his word, he speaks of terrible judgment. All peoples on earth will mourn. But when he speaks to people who trust him, he says, “Lift up your heads, your redemption is drawing near.” For us, even the judgment is good thing. It means the end of all the hatred and opposition to us and our message. It means vindication for us who held onto Christ. It means glory forever.

All that, our king will bring us. Jesus is the king of kings, the ruler of all kings. On Judgment Day, every president, every emperor, every lord or master will kneel before him. But already now, he is in control. He is guiding all things to that day when he doesn’t hide his rule anymore. On that day, we will see him, too. And we will rejoice forever. Amen.