



November 24, 2019
Reign of Christ Sunday

Psalm 95:1-7 / Psalm 96:1-6, 10-13;
Colossians 1:3-14

Sampling Heavenly Fare

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Today we celebrate! It's thanksgiving, of course. I can't wait to take a place at our family's 25-foot table this coming Thursday, and savor our feast—turkey, stuffing, apple-cranberry relish, corn compote, sunshine carrots, hordes of other vegetables ... then there's the pies! What family delicacy makes your mouth water?! I love this season, and I cling to the spirit of gratitude, as long as possible, before the commercial excess of Christmas sets in.

Today we celebrate! We make a place at tables in our dining room after worship for new members. We can't wait to sample the potluck dishes filling more than 25 feet of tables ... many variations of vegetables and I hope someone brought pie! In the same spirit, I can't wait to savor human goodness, joys and insights, simple gifts and unsung abilities, the sacred grace we'll get to know in one another through weeks and years ahead! I love the spirit of thanksgiving. Even amid struggles and imperfections, it is the beginning of living faith-fully.

Today we especially give thanks and celebrate decades of Pine Island Presbyterian Church bearing fruit together, like the Colossians long ago. Friendships cultivated—life and love rooted in faith, branching out in love. Compassion, joy, commitment sown. Witness grown in our community and as far away as Cameroon. As we discerned next steps on their journey together, we noted quickly all the ways we've been serving the same causes and places, often side by side. Ministry with

Community, Loaves and Fishes, literacy, and their joyously proliferous “hope garden” on six acres just west of Texas Corners. 3,000-4,000 pounds of vegetables harvested for people needing more food security in our community. First Pres supported those efforts with a bit of money and human investment over the years. We’re excited to continue the good work, along with other dreams and plans we can find in the gleam of Chrissy’s eye!

And today we celebrate Reign of Christ Sunday. We tell the story of Jesus the Christ from Advent incarnation, through cross and resurrection, to promise that one day Holy Love in him will reign in all world, to the widest scope of our universe and greatest depths of our hearts. This text from Colossians doesn’t imagine divine reign with military conquest or medieval monarchical power. Like Pine Island’s hope garden, God’s holy commonwealth gets envisioned in more agricultural terms. Good news of Holy Love for all people gets seeded in our relationships as we lift our hearts to the Holy One with joy and awe and majesty. It sprouts as we learn and search with honesty. It bears fruit as each member’s life adds to the whole. It grows high and wide as we go to make a difference throughout the world.

Christian tradition says Paul wrote this letter when he was in prison. Even amid hard times for himself, he nurtured hope for others. Each new day of life, friends, that’s the best we have. That’s what radiates this day with the “joyful noise” of fine music, new members, and holy communion. Hope. We know God’s reign of peace is not yet complete. In our personal lives, as we follow the news, as we meet here at church. Still we live into hope, rising for us like the cross at the heart of our faith. Hope that God’s love in Jesus, made real in resurrection, endures stronger and more life-giving than all else in this world. Hope shining in the darkness that no illness or disaster or war can quench. Hope growing as we sample Holy Love in people following Jesus, living as he leads: with grace, compassionate service, peace. Hope guiding us into the heavenly realm in our world as God creates and intends it to be.

You see, friends, here's a central point Paul tries to get clear. We glean this hope of heaven through care for one another. It doesn't magically materialize. It's not just a spiritual sense out of thin air. It's as practical as tilling and weeding. It's as personal as naming Epaphras, whoever he was. It's unceasing prayer, nurturing wisdom of grace in daily experience. Then bearing fruit of patience, joy, fortitude, forgiveness harvested like an inheritance from others who sat in these pews before us. And shared with others who just may have settled in to our familiar place, or inevitably will someday. Each person ... with stories of living faith like crosses newly hung on our wall in the Gathering Place. Lives that entwine with ours, maybe like the three sisters of corn, beans, and squash flourishing together as the Wampanoag taught Pilgrims long ago.

400 years later, we in Pine Island and First churches begin a new relationship. All of us pilgrims on a journey of living faith join again for a feast. Who knows what years ahead for us in this congregation will be? We give thanks for our love in the Spirit, especially revealed to us in uncertain times. As we celebrate, we reconsecrate what we know at the best of both congregations. We open our hearts and minds to people and places in our world that seem far from joyous and abounding in life. Maybe some among us or that we know still suffering, rehabbing, or wondering at which table they might gather this Thursday.

We sing to God a new song. We tell good news of loving salvation, Divine glory of human beings fully alive in all nations, marvelous evidence of grace, not unlike the holy majesty, strength, beauty among us in this sanctuary. I'm told by Pat and teachers and others who saw kids last Sunday that many of our newest little friends had such a wonderful time, excited to come again. This past Wednesday, new members who met with Session, affirmed what we often hear, when we're at our best—giving thanks for warm welcoming fellowship, worship, and outreach ... or

some variation thereof. At that meeting Liz Hamilton began with reflection to fertilize our work together. She talked about how thankfulness opens us up to God ... and to others especially those who may not have access to resources we do. And as she read a devotional piece, my heart and mind got caught by the phrase “samples of heavenly fare”. That’s what we share together when we sense Holy Love reigning among us—samples of heavenly fare.

In a few moments we’ll come to this table where we share the joyful feast of the people of God. All are welcome, to share this feast, of course, no strangers here. This past Monday when we celebrated communion at Wyndham, as the “bread of life” we used pancakes from the men’s breakfast, as abundant as God’s grace. It was fun! Unless there’s some other surprise waiting, we’ll use bread lovingly prepared through unsung efforts of people like Epaphras in this congregation. As we come forward, may our thoughts fill with thanksgiving for all the unique expressions of the “bread of life” and loving salvation we’ll sample together in Christ through years to come! May they be mouth-watering, hope-inducing for the heart, as we bear fruit of life and witness, and our world grows evermore into the Commonwealth of peace God wants all people and creation to share!

Thanks be to God. Amen.