

Introduction

Check-in & Introductions

In the Midst of the City

Psalm

Psalm 46 (NRSVUE)

- ¹ God is our refuge and strength,
a very present help in trouble.
- ² Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change,
though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea,
³ though its waters roar and foam,
though the mountains tremble with its tumult. *Selah*
- ⁴ There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,
the holy habitation of the Most High.
- ⁵ God is in the midst of the city; it shall not be moved;
God will help it when the morning dawns.
- ⁶ The nations are in an uproar; the kingdoms totter;
he utters his voice; the earth melts.
- ⁷ The LORD of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our refuge. *Selah*
- ⁸ Come, behold the works of the LORD;
see what desolations he has brought on the earth.
- ⁹ He makes wars cease to the end of the earth;
he breaks the bow and shatters the spear;
he burns the shields with fire.
- ¹⁰ "Be still, and know that I am God!
I am exalted among the nations;
I am exalted in the earth."
- ¹¹ The LORD of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our refuge. *Selah*

Bible/Sermon Focus

"Remember the beginning of COVID..."

We have all heard so many stories begin with that sentence fragment.
We will continue to do so.

We all have memories of those first few weeks and months of the pandemic. I remember empty highways while everyone was at home, sheltering in place. I remember finding a group of less than 10 people that could gather together to create a make-shift school for our kids. I remember daily chalk drawings on our front sidewalk, Lego structures taller than my children who were building them, and moving an entire Adult Faith Formation program online. We blew bubbles everyday and I collected sticks and dead fall from the local park, since I could no longer buy wood the at the store. The store trips were divided among us and two other

families. We each went once every other week. We shopped for each other. I learned the names of the birds that live in my yard. Our church was hit with a financial blow like I have never seen, and the other clergy and I were counting days until we (by choice) would be the first of the staff to reduce our salaries.

“What about Easter?”

“Who is ‘essential’?”

“How are you holding up?”

We moved church community online and since *time* didn't exist I would work whenever I couldn't rest. Sometimes at 2:00 am. Sometimes at 5:00 pm. Always when we would have Facebook devotional times. I spent extra time reaching out to friends I knew that lived alone. One night, around 1:00 am I was out on my porch on my computer working and stopped to check Facebook. I realized a church friend of mine was awake. She's in her 80's and (in her words) “sleeps whenever she feels like it.”

So I found myself at 1:00 am, picking up firewood sticks from the grassy boulevard median in front of my house, on the phone with this friend laughing and talking. And she reminded me that when the people of God were in the wilderness, and they didn't have a temple, and that God found a way. And that was the first time I heard this metaphor for the wilderness for the season of COVID, one I would hear many times a week after that. And collectively, all of us believers remembered that the “Reign of Christ” was not contained in four walls, but in our lives. We remembered that the Spirit of God meets us and guides us anywhere we are.

What does the “Reign of Christ,” the “Kingdom of God” look like when the world shuts down? And, beloveds, what does the “Reign of Christ,” the “Kingdom of God” look like, now?

We are in a new season, clearly.

So, what does the “Reign of Christ,” the “Kingdom of God” look like for you now? For your family? For our church?

On Sunday, Pastor Andy said that he is craving *consistency*. Our culture in the United States is one that seems to demand consistency even though that's not really the way God's creation works. We want fresh fruit year round, even when items are out of season and has to be shipped using massive amounts of resources to get them to us. We want the same seat in our favorite chair or pew at church while we sing how God is making all things new. We are told we can “have it our way.” But the sun still sets on a beautiful day that we don't want to end.

The “Reign of Christ,” the “Kingdom of God” are not consistent, even as the world pushes back against creation in an attempt to control it. No, it's not consistent. But it is cyclical, and as Pastor Andy said, creation does move forward, spiraling along more like a helix than a circle. I feel like a lot of us learned that our lives weren't consistent in the ways that we thought. Things we take for granted like, always having toilet paper. Some of us stopped for the first time and took a breath and realized that the changing of the seasons offered something to us if we were just willing to catch the rhythm of them.

I don't crave consistently right now as much as I crave for us to all finally move on a bit. To let ourselves gently into the next season.

There are seasons to our lives. There are seasons in creation. There are seasons in our church. These, glorious, liturgical rhythms of our lives surround us and invite us to lean into them.

We cannot stay stuck in a season, whether one of joy or collective trauma. Liminal spaces will always lead back to distinct and discernable moments. And beloveds it's time to find a rhythm and move with the momentum of the Spirit.

This is not a season to work at 2:00 am. This is not a season to figure out how we can pare down our ministries and weather the storm. The temple is open and we are no longer in the wilderness. What seeds should we plant to NOW in order to harvest fresh fruit in late spring? What fruit needs harvesting before the intense freeze of winter comes? Reign of Christ Sunday is the last Sunday of the church year. Next week, Advent will begin and we will move into the next season. A season of expecting the light of God to enter into the world.

I cannot guarantee what that will look like, but I do know that God is an ever present help no matter the season, and that we have weathered the storm, and we are being called home...back to the Reign of Christ.

Discussion Questions

1. What do you crave more in this season, consistency or movement? Something else?
2. What lesson are you taking with you from the pandemic?
3. What does the Reign of Christ look like to you?
4. If we were in the wilderness, where are we now? (What Bible narratives fit the current situation?)
5. What do you love about the cyclical nature of creation? Of the seasons? Of the church calendar?

Prayer

Holy God we thank you for your continued guidance in each season. Help us to witness to the Reign of Christ in each other and in creation. **Amen.**

"Living in a climate of deep insecurity, Jesus, faced with so narrow a margin of civil guarantees, had to find some other basis upon which to establish a sense of well-being ... [H]e projected a dream, the logic of which would give to all the needful security. There would be room for all, and no man would be a threat to his brother. 'The kingdom of God is within.'"
- Howard Thurman