

**Brookfield Congregational Church**  
**Christ the King Sunday**  
**“It Is Enough”**  
**Colossians 1:10-20**

You may not realize it, but today is not only the Sunday before Thanksgiving, and the Sunday we dedicate the pledges received over the past month of our stewardship drive, and the Sunday we hold a congregational meeting to present the general budget and vote on changes to the congregational bylaws. Today is not only all those things; it is also the last Sunday of the church year.

Next Sunday, we begin a whole new church year with the start of Advent, the four-week period leading up to Christmas and the birth of the baby Jesus. But today—this last Sunday in the church year—we celebrate Christ the King Sunday or Reign of Christ Sunday as it’s sometimes called. We begin every church year with the birth of a baby and end every year in celebration of a king.

You may have seen those pictures of Jesus as a king with a crown on his head and a scepter or sword in his hand. I don’t know about you, but I’ve never been overly fond of those pictures. In our souls we know that if Christ is a king, then somehow he’s not the kind who wears a big robe and a fancy crown.

So what sort of king is Christ? Paul’s letter to the church at Colossus offers us some insights. In Eugene Peterson’s translation, the first insight we hear is that Christ is the one who rescues us from the pit.

For a moment, this description of Christ rescuing us from danger makes him sound a little like a super hero. Look! It’s a bird! It’s a plane! No, it’s Super-Christ. There are some modern pictures of Jesus that make him look like a hunky superhero. We know in our hearts that this isn’t quite the right picture of Christ the King either.

But then we read on in Paul: Christ is the one in whom “all the broken and dislocated pieces of the universe—people and things, animals and atoms—get properly fixed and fit together.”

According to Peterson’s translation, Paul also calls Christ “spacious”—“so roomy that everything of God finds its proper place in him without crowding.” In a more traditional translation, Paul writes that in Christ, “all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell.” Put those together and you have a Christ who is big enough to contain all that God is.

And what is God? According to the song the choir sang this morning, it is enough to know that God is love.

What kind of king is Christ? Christ is the King of Love—with a heart so big that it can hold together all the broken and dislocated pieces of the universe—including your brokenness and mine.

This week, I came across a story. It isn't about Jesus Christ or about God. But somehow, I think this little story says something about what sort of king the King of Love might be.

Once upon a time, the steam locomotive was the way most folks and most freight traveled around the country. It was a time when people gathered around the radio instead of a TV, a time long before computers and cell phones and I-pods. Late at night, as people lay in bed, they could hear the squeal of the old steam whistles, telling them that Old 97 was heading out of town, wishing each and everyone a good night.

Charlie was an engineer on one of those old steam locomotives. He had spent most of his life riding the rails, first as a child, hopping rides out to the swimming hole, and then as an adult, blowing the whistle as he drove past the next generation of children hoping to hitch a ride.

With the help of his wife, Charlie had raised a family—two fine sons and three lovely daughters—in a little wood-frame house with a big garden in the back and a cement pond for Charlie's goldfish.

Charlie's life was good. But sometimes driving a train meant spending hours sitting on a siding, waiting for a slow freight train to move past. You had schedules to keep and deadlines to meet, but what could you do? You waited. You spent hours tending your garden and waited for it to produce food for your table. You spent more hours trying to help your children understand the whys and wherefores of life. Or you sat by their bedside, waiting for a fever to break, and all you could do through the long night was wait and pray. Charlie had learned how to wait.

That's probably what turned Charlie into a whistler and a teller of stories.

Wherever he went, Charlie whistled—usually a sweet, slow tune that set a peaceful pace for his journey—whether it was a journey by train to distant cities or just a walk to the icebox for a glass of milk.

And whenever the opportunity presented itself, Charlie was ready with a story—especially on those occasions when he found himself talking to someone who was hurting, or afraid, or just tangled up with a problem they couldn't solve. He'd give them a story, and he usually left them feeling better than he found them.

Sometimes, Charlie told a story just for the sheer pleasure of it. If he were here right now, he might tell us the story about the big yellow dog he met one night.

Charlie had taken a few runs on the late shift to cover for a friend who was very ill, and it was late evening by the time he headed home from the roundhouse. It was a fine night, he wasn't in any particular hurry and Charlie thought he'd enjoy a change of scenery, so he decided to take an unfamiliar route home.

He was walking and whistling when he turned a corner and heard a dog's angry bark. At the far end of the street, on the same side as Charlie, was this big yellow dog tied up in the yard of a

house. The dog barked furiously, letting Charlie know he wasn't welcome at this hour. Charlie crossed to the other side of the street and continued walking and whistling.

As Charlie got closer, the dog started growling. When Charlie was directly across the street from the dog, Charlie stopped and stood there for a few minutes, whistling his tune. Then, with the dog still sounding his warning growl, Charlie headed on home.

The next night, Charlie took the same route. When he came to the spot across the street from the barking dog, Charlie stopped and sat down on the curb. Across the street, the dog growled and barked and snarled. Charlie just whistled a soft, slow tune, and then he told his new friend about some of the things that had happened at work that day.

After twenty minutes, filled with the dog's growls and snarls, Charlie got up and went home to bed.

After four or five nights of this, the dog began spending more time listening and less time snarling. The dog and Charlie sat on opposite sides of the street, one whistling and talking, and one staring and wondering.

The next night, part way through the conversation, Charlie reached into his pocket and pulled out a piece of doughnut he had saved from his dinner. He walked across to the dog's side of the street, tore the doughnut in half, plopped one half into his mouth, and tossed the other half to the dog.

The next night, Charlie strolled down the dog's side of the street. Each night for the next week, Charlie stopped at the dog's house, sat and whistled and told stories and tossed the dog pieces of doughnut or hotdog, or whatever else he had brought along.

By the end of that second week, the big yellow dog was listening for Charlie's whistle as he turned the corner. And as Charlie walked down the street, the dog would greet him with yips of pleasure and a wagging tail.

What kind of king is Christ? Christ is the King of Love, and like Charlie, the King of Love knows how to wait patiently, gathering up the broken and fragmented pieces of a world that barks, and growls and snarls in its pain. The King of Love does not force us into obedience to a set of rules, but instead draws us into his heart with patience and forgiveness and mercy. He rules not with a sword, but with a story—the story of God's incredible love.

It is enough, the song told us this morning, to know that God is love.

A poem by a man named John van de Laar, puts it better than I can. He calls his poem “The UnKing.”

We call you 'King', Jesus, but you're not like any king we've ever heard of;  
You don't flaunt your power, waving your hand dismissively to change the lives of  
your subjects;  
You don't hoard your wealth, and tax your people just to grow more comfortable in  
your isolated palace;  
You don't exploit the weak and unconnected, or use the ambition of ladder-climbers  
to further your control.  
No, you are the King who lays down his crown, to walk among us as one of us;  
You are the King who lays down his life, to bring abundant, eternal life to all who  
seek it;  
You are the King who draws the weak, the rejected, the poor, the child into the center  
of the conversation and into the heart of where real power lies.  
You, Jesus, are the UnKing – the King whose Kingdom, redefines everything we  
know. . .

And that is why we come together with thanksgiving this morning. Knowing that God is love, we offer our pledges of money for the capital campaign and for the annual budget, as well as our pledges of time and talents. We offer them in tribute to the King of Love, the one who gathers us up. We offer them as working capital to help extend God's reign of love to all the broken and fragmented pieces of the world.

On this last Sunday of the Church Year, it is enough to be here in this majesty. It is enough to know that God is love.

Amen