

Welcome to the Reign of Christ Sunday. This is a special Sunday, because it is the last Sunday for the year. I've said this a couple of times to the confirmation class. And each time they look confused and try to correct me.

I realize that today is November 20. We aren't even at the last Sunday of the month let alone the calendar year. Even though we just had our annual meeting, the new committee members and Moderator do not officially take over until January 1. So, I can't mean that our new committee year starts soon.

No, I am talking about our liturgical year, the year based on the Christian beliefs and seasons. The liturgical year starts with Advent, and then takes us through Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter, Pentecost, the Sundays after Pentecost, and finally the Reign of Christ Sunday or Festival of Christ.

Typically today is a celebration. As Christians we celebrate everything that has happened in the church the previous year. We celebrate Jesus' teachings and our appreciation and love for God. We decorate the church and prepare for the anticipation of his birth. Our scripture prophecies about the coming of a messiah.

Our reading from Jeremiah today doesn't talk about the coming of Jesus. No, it talks about leadership or more importantly, God placing leaders where they need to be. I feel that this is an important idea for us to address because of so many events happening around us.

Last week, many of us heard about the three young men that were shot and killed on the University of Virginia campus. I don't know how many of you heard about the shooting on the University of New Mexico campus yesterday. One young man was shot and killed, while another was shot and last I knew was in critical condition. We keep hearing stories about shootings and murders with our young people. And it is terrible.

Unfortunately, there are people out there that are not upset about what has happened. I have had people over the years tell me things like, "It was their own fault, if they wouldn't have put themselves in that situation they would be alive. What do you expect? It was just a matter of time." These people do not know what or why it happened. They just know that it happened to someone other than themselves.

I do not know exactly what happened in these situations, or why they happened. I just know that we have lost four people over senseless violence. Four of God's children were murdered in cold blood.

Last week I had a couple of conversations with people about the University of Virginia shootings. I'm sure most of you in the congregation will agree with the comments I heard. One person said that if we had better gun control laws, this wouldn't have happened. Someone else said that if we hadn't been defunding the police, an officer could have been there or responded faster and saved them.

Now, I don't know if either of those arguments are right or wrong. But, what I do know is that someone failed those young men. In so many ways surrounding both events, better leadership could have saved them. It has been twenty-five hundred years since Jeremiah's prophecy and we really aren't much better now than back then.

Jeremiah is talking to us about shepherds and their flocks. He tells us that God has seen these poor leaders who let his children run astray. His children are led away from his grace and glory. They are lost, but their shepherds do not care.

The shooters are much like these lost children. Somewhere in their lives, their leaders stopped taking care of them. They stopped watching and coaching the shooters. They stopped trying to give them direction and teach them the difference between right and wrong.

The University of Virginia shooter had a number of issues before the shooting. A year before he was convicted of having a concealed firearm during an accident. He was supposed to report this conviction to the university as terms for his probation. But, he never did and nobody ever followed up. What would have happened if he had a better leader in his life that would have been there with him after his conviction?

God sees these terrible leaders everywhere. He watches as some leaders put their own personal gain above the well-being of his flock. He knows that some leaders force people away from where they belong. And he says in Jeremiah that his judgment will fall upon these people and they will be removed.

As leaders, we have a responsibility that is greater than ourselves. We have a responsibility to those that we serve. We have a responsibility to help them and to teach them how to help themselves. God calls us to lead on his behalf and not our own agenda.

In our Gospel lesson from Luke, we are told about God's greatest leader, shepherd, and prophet. This is why we celebrate the reign of Christ. He reminds us of God's love and our covenant with him. Jesus prepares us for our salvation and forgives our sins. He is with us in our darkest times and leads us to peace.

We rejoice in God's name for the coming of his son. We will share in his feast and celebrate by preparing for the upcoming year and his birth. But most of all, we need to remember that God's judgment is not for us to decide. He has a plan for each of us and he will guide us to where we need to be. But until that time, we should continue to spread his love and peace. Amen