

**“I HAVE A REPERTOIRE TOO: HYMNS TO  
STRENGTHEN OUR FAITH – BE THOU MY VISION”**

PSALM 100, EPHESIANS 1:15-23  
MATTHEW 6:19-24

MARKET SQUARE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN  
HARRISBURG, PENNSYLVANIA

**THE REVEREND KELLY WIA NT**

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For Christians, this is the last Sunday of the year. Obviously, we are still five weeks away from the end of the western calendar. Time Magazine has not yet released its special edition, Year in Review. But this is the end of our Christian calendar, the Sunday between Ordinary Time and Advent. Today is Christ the King Sunday. It is the day we proclaim that Christ is Lord of all creation and High King of Heaven. It is from this vantage point that we look back and we look forward. Our year in review always falls under the reign of Christ.

It was quite a year.....In late August (August 28th), Tropical Storm Harvey made landfall dropping 40 to 61 inches of rain in southeastern Texas and Louisiana. Less than two weeks later (September 10th), Hurricane Irma pounded South Florida. And only days after that (sept 20th), Hurricane Maria devastated the beautiful island of Puerto Rico. Wild fires in California have charred thousands of homes and claimed the lives of at least 40 people. We cannot begin to calculate the wildlife that fell victim to the flames. Frighteningly, as our planet continues to warm, these events may become more frequent and deadlier.

We remember the victims of the mass shooting at the First Baptist Church in Sutherland Springs and those who were gathered for an outdoor concert in Las Vegas. Both horrendous tragedies were well covered in the media. But if you consider a mass shooting, any shooting that involves four or more victims, there have been 394 (11-24-17). People are dying by gunfire at an alarming rate.

Our country is in political upheaval. We are more polarized than ever before. I was listening to IA on NPR Tuesday morning. Joshua Johnson's guest stated that this election cycle has been extremely unusual because of the continued vitriol and hatred on both sides. The division seems to be running deeper and the animosity growing. We

don't understand each other and too easily write off the person with opposing political views.

There is the ongoing investigation into Russian interference with our elections, touching some of the highest-ranking leaders in our country. Health insurance has become a political pawn, which means the lives of many and especially the poor are merely pawns in a political game. The white nationalist movement has grown and become more brazen leading to the death of a young woman in Charlottesville. Racism continues to be a scourge on our society. Accusations of sexual harassment and assault have taken down beloved movie stars, political leaders, and executives. The tragedy is not that those individuals have lost their jobs or reputation but that our culture has allowed such abuse to take place and not only stifled the voices of women but undervalued their very humanity for centuries.

On the national level, it's been a hard year and I haven't even touched on the upheaval internationally.

For many in this congregation it has been a painful year, personally. There has been death, grief, cancer treatments, illness, relationship struggles, and loss.

So here we sit, at the end of a difficult year facing another which will likely hold disappointment, sorrow, scandal, death, and destruction. How is it that this day is a day of celebration?

On Christ the King Sunday, we once again refocus our eyes and hearts on Christ. We pray that Christ might be our vision and our light in a time of darkness and confusion.

Paul says it like this, "I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you...." Paul is writing to the church in Ephesus about hope. It is hope born out of God's power and work in Christ. It is a hope that is only possible through faith. It is a hope not of our doing, not of end results, or clear outcomes, but of God's power at work in the world. It is an invitation to see the world differently and to allow God to be our vision.

This is the final installment in our sermon series, Hymns to Strengthen our Faith. Tom offered reflections on seven of his favorite hymns. I have offered two, *Be Thou My Vision*, being the second. I would guess that this is another crowd favorite. Many of us grew up singing this hymn regardless of the denomination of which we were a part. Both the tune and the poetry are familiar.

It also happens to be the perfect hymn for Christ the King Sunday because it helps us orient our lives and our view of the world in Christ. It is a hymn of hope.

“Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart...” There is so much in this world vying for our hearts or maybe seeking to break them. The hymn assumes rightly that our hearts belong to God. It is here that we must begin. We are invited to take note of what gets in the way, what seeks to push God out of our thoughts and our hearts. It is the challenge Scripture presents as well, “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

The hymn boldly proclaims,  
“Riches I heed not, nor vain empty praise;  
thou mine inheritance, now and always;  
thou and thou only, first in my heart,  
High King of Heaven, my treasure thou art.”

Now, I’m going to confess something here. While I love this line in the hymn, I do not sing it as if it were always true. I know that fear, greed, desire for comforts, and my own ego at times get in the way. There are many things that vie for my heart and I, like most humans, can be a bit fickle. I want God to be my treasure and my only treasure, but I am tempted, and I am sometimes afraid to live as if God were my heart and my treasure. Who knows what that might require of me!?! So, I sing this hymn as a prayer, as a longing, and out of desire to reorder my life. It is a song of yearning for what I hope to be true and true all the time.

On Christ the King Sunday, we are called to celebrate Christ as not only the High King of Heaven but the king of our hearts, lives, and world. We are reminded that all that is belongs to Christ and that we are to look at the world through this vision - through Christ. “Waking or sleeping,” Christ’s presence is to be our light and our hope in the world.

It is easy to look back over the past year and see only loss, devastation, and anguish. It is easy to see the uncertainty, the fear, the hatred, and the vitriol. But we are to look for Christ at all times and to trust our world, our present, and our future to God. We hope in what we cannot see, in a vision of a future that is God’s.

Scripture speaks of such a future in poetic terms in the book of Revelation:

“See, the home of God is among mortals.  
He will dwell with them as their God;  
They will be his peoples  
And God will be with them;  
God will wipe every tear from their eyes.  
Death will be no more; [and]  
Mourning and crying and pain will be no more....

This does not mean that we ignore that pain in the world or put on rose colored glasses. It does mean, however, that we trust and believe that what we see now is not final. This is not the end. Christ’s final vision is one that we may never see in this

lifetime, but it is one that sustains us even in the darkness, even in the face of hurricane, fire, death, and pain.

This vision also reorients us so that the eyes of our hearts are enlightened and can see the hope around us. Of the 20 or so people that lived around our church building last winter, almost all of them have found permanent housing. A little miracle happened right under our noses. It was not magical for it took many people hours and hours and required great patience of those living in the tents, but that makes it all the more beautiful. Out of the limelight, out of the news, out of most people's vision, almost 20 individuals moved off the street and into a home, into a place they could call their own and lay their weary heads.

Every Sunday of this past year, breakfast was served from our church basement. Thousands of dollars were given to the church and then to ministries seeking to serve those in need. Tyler arrived and under his leadership the music program has already grown to include the youth Celebration Ringers and the Children's Choir. If you need one sign of hope in this world, think back upon the day that 20 young people from South Korea in an impromptu move came forward to join our children in singing *Jesus Loves Me*.

Each day, despite hurricane, fire, wind, and rain, God made the sun to rise and more often than not it was with spectacular beauty. Each sunrise a reminder that life continues despite our grief and struggles. Each day an opportunity to begin again, to see Christ in the world, and to pray for God's wisdom to face the hours ahead.

Finally, infants, including my own daughter, were baptized at this font. Parents promised to raise their children to know God and we as a congregation pledged to support them and to do our part in education and in loving. In the face of the pain, violence, and devastation in the world, this may seem such a small thing, but it is not, it is radically defiant and hope-filled. We baptize children and adults claiming that our lives belong to Christ and in so doing we seek to place Christ at the center. We make Christ our vision. We claim that nothing in this world has a greater claim upon us. Nothing can ultimately undo or take away Christ's victory over death on our behalf. This is why we can confidently sing,

"Heart of my own heart, whatever befall, still be my vision, O Ruler of all."

Whatever may come, whatever the future holds, we affirm that Christ is our vision, our power, our wisdom, our strength, our glory, our victory. Whatever may seek to destroy or wound or rob us of life, has already been overcome by Christ who is ruler of all and our light in the world. Even when this mortal life has come to an end, we trust our lives to God singing, "High King of Heaven, my victory won, may I reach heaven's joys, O bright heaven's sun!" Even then, Christ is our vision and our assurance that death is not the end, but a new beginning, a homecoming, a welcome into the saints of heaven. Our hearts, our lives, and our end belong to God through Christ.

So, my friends, may this Christ the King Sunday, empower you and clear your vision so that you see Christ in the world and see the world through the lense of Christ. May this be a day of celebration and a day of hope. It's been a hard year, but it has also been a year filled with beauty, love, defiant hope, and Christ's presence and light. As the new church year begins, may we trust our lives to Christ and may Christ be our vision.

May it be so. Amen.