

November 22, 2021 | Reign of Christ Sunday  
Reflection | Prayer as Absolute Attention, & the Art of Asking “When did we?”

And they asked

When did we?

When did we see you hunger?

When did we see you thirst?

When did we offer you food?

When did we offer you clothing?

*“Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.”*

The Liturgical calendar

Names today

Reign of Christ Sunday, or

Christ the King

And this passage we’ve heard is one of those typically appointed for this day

With its use of royal language

Even if that language is being used with a clever slant

A subversive bait-and-switch if you will.

Depending on one’s religious background and experience, it’s one that is often well known.

Last year’s reflection on this day, sought to unpack how we might grapple, in an expansive and pluralistic way with the term *Jesus is Lord* and find perhaps a more generous way to inhabit that language within our own understandings, even if it may remain a problematic public declaration.

[https://mcusercontent.com/a0f92b629ef5d45b6f7677645/files/96c9ce38-49c1-8434-3e6b-77d44b8735b4/Sermon\\_Nov\\_22.pdf](https://mcusercontent.com/a0f92b629ef5d45b6f7677645/files/96c9ce38-49c1-8434-3e6b-77d44b8735b4/Sermon_Nov_22.pdf)

So I’d like to take a moment to place this in the narrative

Which is something we lose of course when we encounter Scripture

Portioned out in weekly instalments.

Despite being on the verge of Advent, we find ourselves this week and next at the end of the Gospels.

Jesus is in Jerusalem, where in the narrative he is soon to be betrayed, arrested, tried and executed by the state.

All this follows a dramatic scene of public witness

As Jesus rides into Jerusalem on a donkey

Surrounded by a crowd of workers and peasants

Laying down cloaks and leafy branched

Shouting Hosanna

A cry of longing for salvation.

This crowd marches on the Temple

Where Jesus drives out those who are changing money and selling wares

Then begins his residency of teaching in the courtyard

Which includes two notable and quotable moments

The first is the so-called widows mite

Jesus is watching the crowd put their offering in the treasury

He notes how the rich come and give of their plenty

But then a widow comes and puts in her last two pennies.

It's a story that we've sentimentalized

But it's actually a tragedy

Those who have an abundance

Offer a sum that barely changes their bank balance

While the poorest and most vulnerable

Give away the last of their meager lot, all they had to survive

If we're attentive readers, we note that just a paragraph earlier, Jesus said of the sort who give of their wealth to guarantee them the best seats in the house, and the places of influence,

*They devour the houses of the widows*

And on the heels of this, he points to the stones of the temple

And proclaims

Not one stone will remain intact!

Then he goes out of town

To the mount of olives

A hillside one can still visit today

Famous in Jewish lore as the place many of the Hebrew prophets (with whom Jesus had such affinity) were buried

It is here that Jesus weeps over the state of his people and their community

Incidentally, it was said of the prophets that what drove them was their ability to feel God's suffering in times of national tragedy and injustice

His eyes barely drying

Jesus sits down and begins to teach

And among the teachings he offers,

Is this passage we've heard today

This is not a strange detour from his main curriculum

This is Jesus once again returning to a central theme

Pay attention

Pay attention

Pay attention

Jesus' trenching style has been repeating the act of inviting apprentices to pay attention

Abide in love

Make a home in love

Create a practice of holding love, compassion, attention, awareness

Simone Weil famously taught...

*Absolutely unmixed attention is prayer. If we turn our mind toward the good, it is impossible that little by little the whole soul will not be attracted thereto in spite of itself.*

*Whenever you did so for the least of these who are members of my family...*

Buddhist teacher and co-founder of Insight Meditation Society, Sharon Salzberg...

<https://onbeing.org/blog/a-new-vision-of-kindness-starts-with-paying-attention/>

To be fair, being “nice” isn’t really the same thing as being kind. Etymologically, to be “kind” is related to the word “kin” — treating others as we would our own kind, our family, ourselves.

Another modern Buddhist teacher, Tara Brach

<https://www.tarabrach.com/attention-the-most-basic-form-of-love/>

Whenever we wholeheartedly attend to the person we’re with, to the tree in our front yard, or to a squirrel perched on a branch, this living energy becomes an intimate part of who we are.

Krishnamurti wrote that “to pay attention means we care, which means we really love.”  
*Attention is the most basic form of love. By paying attention, we let ourselves be touched by life, and our hearts naturally become more open and engaged.*

<https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2015/07/mindfulness-meditation-empathy-compassion/398867/>

So in this time where things seem so big

And so overwhelming

Where life can feel so morally compromised

Amidst economic and ecological crises  
Amidst confounding questions about the future

I don’t know about you

But for me it impedes my ability to pay attention

To find clarity

To feel a cohesiveness

Connection

It’s in response to this feeling, and sense that it’s a shared phenomenon

That we have created

A daily calendar

Of invitation to prayer

[https://mcusercontent.com/a0f92b629ef5d45b6f7677645/files/57b138d5-5b59-657f-eb34-27ed656d51fd/KMUC\\_Prayer\\_Calendar.pdf](https://mcusercontent.com/a0f92b629ef5d45b6f7677645/files/57b138d5-5b59-657f-eb34-27ed656d51fd/KMUC_Prayer_Calendar.pdf)

For the next 40 days

Starting tomorrow morning

Ending on December 31

The Board of Knox-Metropolitan United Church will be practicing attentively holding our community in prayer, through using a Daily Prayer Calendar

And would like to invite you to join as well

(To our friends watching in Grenfell, we've sent along the file, and invite you, if interested, to adjust it to reflect your own community)

Each day

There is one aspect of the life of this community named

And we are invited to hold that which is named

In our attention

With intention

Inviting our heart to open

Inviting our imagination to spark

Trusting that the compassion which is at the core of our collected reality

Is resilient and perseveres even amidst stress, distraction, frustration, hurt and challenge

So how might you engage

Perhaps each day

You might sit with this calendar open before you

Maybe light a candle

And come to a point of stillness in your mind and body

Invite a sense of openness

And in that space

Bring your awareness to the invitation of the day

Perhaps the nature of your life means that a daily sit down might not be the best fit

Perhaps instead you will check the daily invitation as you begin

And hold it with you throughout the day

Perhaps you will make a practice

Of intentionally returning to it

Again and again

Like a guiding word

Throughout the day

Whenever you have a moment or two

It is not a matter of quantity of time but quality of attention.

The key with this

As with any spiritual practice

Is just that

Practice

Attentively and Intentionally

Creating and curating

Within ourselves and our interactions

That which we believe to be possible

To be beautiful

To be salvific and transformative

That we might come to an ever-increasing awareness

Of our interconnectedness with all things

This spirituality of interconnectedness, and abiding in attentive love, is the inhale which accompanies the ethical call of the Jesus movement to radical solidarity and challenge empire.

Each making the other possible, and informing their contours.

*We are not alone...*