

## Last Pentecost B; The Reign of Christ

Lections: 2Samuel 23:1-7; Ps. 132: 1-18; Rev. 1:4b-8; John 18: 33-37

There are signs of endings all around us, says our new hymn. The second verse proclaims that endings are also beginnings. We hear that in today's texts – Revelations says that God is the beginning **and** the end, the Alpha and the Omega...the opening and closing of the Word among us. What are we to make of that? One of my daughters was laid off from her job, 2 months short of being vested for retirement. I cannot tell her easily that there is a new beginning coming, starting even now; many of us don't see the beginnings in the midst of the endings. How is it that **you** discovered that truth for yourself? Are you able to speak with the assurance of faith that God is in the midst of it all?

In the text from Second Samuel we have the ending, the last words of David as his reign comes to a close. He offers some parting wisdom, "rely on God." He knows his own faults and the failures of Israel's attempts at a monarchy. When he was at his best he knows that those were the times when he relied on God, when he really listened. His strength and the source of his worth were dependent on faith. He sings a song of gratitude about the stewardship of the role he was given. There is an important insight here – when one sees one's gifts as coming from God then celebrating them is not pride in self achievements but in gratitude and praise to the One who gave them. At the end of any job or piece of work are we grateful to God who gave us an opportunity to serve? In our ministry and mission from this place God is blessing us. What is ending or beginning in us this very day?

In today's gospel we are very close to the ending of the Jesus story in John. In this gospel's perspective Jesus has enabled people to "face the truth about themselves, their relationships, their faith and the world in which they live. Even Pilate has the opportunity to do the same..." but he won't. Pilate wants a different kind of truth, one that is found in a label. He asks a question but we know he really isn't curious because he asks a closed question, one that gives only a yes or no answer. He does not know what to do with the answer Jesus gives him which is a question about why. Why is he asking about Jesus being King of the Jews? Does he see Jesus as a threat to his power? Does he just want him to go away? He listens, doesn't hear, and then asks again, "So, are you the king of the Jews?" Jesus invites him into a deeper definition of identity than that of a single label. Jesus tells him that all of his living and doing come from the depth of God; that is the truth of who he is. He is the beginning of a new thing, a new way. This truth is something that Pilate is not curious about.

Lots of things began and ended this week. A new governance structure for the diocesan pattern of doing business – a large group has given way to a smaller council; new structures are shaping us in new ways. Where is God in all of that? Ericka and Darren and I spent the whole day yesterday as we were newly commissioned to serve; the first thing we did was try to rearrange the furniture so that we could see and begin to know each other. An old pattern for clergy ended as a leadership development training had 18 priests for three days with some of the faculty from Carleton University's law school. Our focus was on insight mediation, a new beginning for us so that we might work differently when

others experience threats to their core cares. Clergy had been trained as problem solvers and for years we have tried to answer complaints or fix things for folks so that they could be happy with us and with the church. This new way is intense and offers new possibilities for real growth, but it is hard to begin again. Exciting but not easy.

Last night's coffee house was a new beginning too as we moved from a notion of scarcity to abundance; so many people from this parish and from beyond this place shared their gifts freely and with so much joy; we stepped into a pattern of new things.

A diocesan clergy day was held here on Thursday – now I won't have to hear the question, "and just where is St. Michaels?" We spent the day with the national church officer for philanthropy and we learned a lot; that same evening our parish council had training from the diocesan stewardship officer, Jane Scanlon. We have a new beginning for our stewardship program which starts next Sunday.

How many of you saw the front page of the Ottawa Citizen this Thursday as the Anglican parish in Perth began a program for skate-boarding youth? As a component of the Fresh Expressions movement, that parish has a new beginning and an end to the enmity of those who broke into the church to find a safe place for recreation. One of our parishioners, who has been in the pew all of two weeks, went to the day long conference on Saturday to see what might fit here. I'm not saying it will be skateboarding, so your blood pressure can go down a bit.

But there have been so many endings and beginnings this week that my head is spinning just a bit. Understanding it all from today's lens of scripture drives us back to Who is underneath it all. God, it seems, is always doing a new thing and is also present in the endings. God invites us in many ways to begin again and again. And so that is what we do. Next Sunday is Advent 1, a new liturgical cycle, a new way of gathering commitments of estimated giving to the parish, and most of all new opportunities to be blessed by God and to be a blessing for others.

Amen+

The Rev. Dr. Linda Privitera