REIGN OF CHRIST SUNDAY

Nu’uanu Congregational Church

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November 21, 2021

*“Eternally Yours” Revelation 1:4b-8*

**As you can see from your bulletins, this Sunday in the church year is known as Reign of Christ Sunday. It is not one of the better known Sundays of the year. It does not come with a whole bunch of traditions or even a particular ritual. Indeed,** Reign of Christ Sunday is a relatively recent addition to the Western [liturgical calendar](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liturgical_year). It was first instituted in 1925 by [Pope Pius XI](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pope_Pius_XI) for the [Roman Rite](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman_Rite) of the [Catholic Church](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catholic_Church). Since that time, it has also become a part of mainline Protestant observance.

One of the things our observance does is it provides closure to the church year and helps us begin a new church year. On this Sunday, we close-out the year that has been, and make ourselves ready for the year ahead of us which begins with the First Sunday of Advent. We allow our thoughts and prayers to focus on what we have heard and learned about Christ throughout the year. We allow ourselves to dwell on his ministry and what it has meant. Specifically, how he has changed the world—even more specifically, how he has changed us—this is what we will take into the new year.

That is why I chose the passage from John’s Book of Revelation.

Most people, when they hear the book of Revelation, they will groan inwardly a little when Revelation is included in the lectionary because of all of the often-terrifying dimensions of the book—the images of weird creatures, the hard words of judgment, the frightening descriptions of the end of the world. This is what most of us remember about our encounters with Revelation. There is no doubt about it: Revelation presents a picture of the world in upheaval, ordinary time and life in cataclysmic disruption.

What I would like to suggest is that this is a *vision* that God has been given to John, and as such, it is *not* a bad thing. Because: rather than a threat of destruction, Revelation is both a testimony and an invitation to participate in the disruption of old ways, old unhealthy patterns of life, and the beginning of new life with Christ leading the way.

Really, this is what the story of Christ has been all along. It has been, and is, the story of the disruption of the way things are; disruption of all that harms and hurts, all that is corrupt and wrong. Christ was born to bring all of those ways of life into account, and to replace them with his way of compassion and integrity.

It might help us to remember why, and to whom John was writing this book.

John of Padmos, the writer of Revelation, had been exiled to a small island. All alone there, God came to him in a vision that he felt compelled to share. And so he began to write. He addressed his book to the seven churches in Asia. Scholars point out that we do not know which churches this points to, and may, in fact, be John’s way of offering it to all believers.

At this point, I would like to state very plainly: John does not know how or when the world will end, and neither does anyone else. So John, undaunted by his circumstances, but also eager to encourage the Jewish-rooted church emerging in Palestine, John composed this book telling them of the vision God has given him about life in their particular time and place.

All of the scary symbolism throughout Revelation, especially describing agents of evil, specifically applies to troubles and upheaval particular to the time when the book was written, namely, in the middle to late first century A.D., not any century since.

John’s book attests to the reality that while a tragic cluelessness kept humankind from fully recognizing Jesus’ authority and might the first time around, there will be no mistaking his authority and might the second time around. And he wrote this book for people who already recognize Jesus’ authority that they might be called and strengthened by the Spirit of the risen Christ to persevere in continuing his work until he returns in glory.

John bases his testimony about Christ by plainly speaking to who Christ is. He is the one who is, was and is to come. He is the Alpha and the Omega.

In this way, John’s vision connects Christ to the God in Exodus (3:14) who reveals God’s self as “I am who I am.” Indeed, in writing that Christ is also the “Alpha and the Omega,” John is saying that Christ was present in the beginning and will occupy our time and experience through the ending of all things. He is eternal, just as God and the Holy Spirit are eternal. This passage speaks to us of an unchanging God who sees all and can redeem all.

But what do we do with this God if our life is changing too much — or if it isn’t changing like we need it to? That is a hard one, isn’t it?

However, John has already answered that for us: Christ is the Alpha and Omega. There is no moment when Christ is going to step away from our life. Our promise and our good news is that Christ will never leave us on our own to struggle. He is part of every moment of our life.

He is with us even in the disruptions we experience in our lives. Yes, a lot of it has been difficult. In our context, when we are thinking of the destruction in the last 2 years, we think of small businesses have been especially hit hard, as have so many who had so little even before the pandemic.

Yet there have also been so many times and ways throughout these past two years in which the disruptions we have seen have also enlightened us and made things clearer—we have seen Christ’s Holy Spirit pointing to things we needed to see. We have seen it in the way in which people have learned, or re-learned to reach out to one another more.

In the first months of the world-wide lockdown, we also saw it in the way in which the earth itself began to rejuvenate. With greatly diminished human impact on the planet, it began to recover, and all of us were able to see and experience creation’s **revival. It was like the earth itself was taking a deep, healing breath.**

**Another of the amazing disruptions so many people in our country experienced was in the government assistance for families and workers (especially minimum wage workers). While I do not know what the long-term effect will be, I do know that with the extra money so many families received many were able to finally experience what it was like to have a *living* wage. So many learned what it was like not to have to worry as much about feeding their families and paying bills. The relief those families experienced was the love of Christ in their lives.**

**Indeed, that particular disruption was not only a gift to the people who directly benefitted from it, it was a call to the rest of us to explore and establish economic possibilities that will make that kind of change last. This was the disruption of the old ways of seeing poverty and a new opportunity to try new ways of assisting struggling people.**

**The question now becomes: will we pay attention to what Christ’s Spirit has shown us? Or will we go back to the way things were? The choice is ours.**

**As for Christ, what John’s vision tells us is that no matter what happens around us, the Spirit is going to be with us—the Alpha and the Omega will continue to be in the midst of our life pointing to important new things that are happening, and inviting us to think and work with the Spirit to see what it can mean for the earth, and for all of God’s beloved people. What John’s vision describes and promises is that God’s love for us, and God’s desire that our lives be filled with righteousness is eternal. God has given God’s self to us. God is eternally ours. Amen!**