Reign of Christ 2018B

Primacy of An Informed Conscience - Rev Karen Urquhart

Text: John 18:33-38

We come together as Christians because together we proclaim the Jesus is Lord of our lives – Today we celebrate “The Reign of Christ” also in the past known as “The feast of Christ the King”– a very different kind of King – The king of love, the servant king

Gathering here today is our response to this first question in our baptismal covenant “Will you continue in the apostles teaching, in breaking of bread and in the prayers?” (<https://c2892002f453b41e8581-48246336d122ce2b0bccb7a98e224e96.ssl.cf2.rackcdn.com/BAS.pdf> page 159)

Last Sunday, Rev Laurel and Rev Elizabeth were with us from Salal and Cedar [(http://salalandcedar.com/)](http://salalandcedar.com/) and Laurel’s homily highlighted the urgency for us to heed the last promise that says…….“Will you strive to safeguard the integrity of God’s creation, and respect, sustain and renew the life of the Earth?” And our response was “I will with God’s help.”

The Anglican church of Canada added this additional promise at General Synod in 2013 and we increasingly see why

In the news yesterday was this report from CNN:

A [new US government report](https://nca2018.globalchange.gov/)delivers a dire warning about climate change and its devastating impacts, saying the economy could lose hundreds of billions of dollars -- or, in the worst-case scenario, more than 10% of its GDP -- by the end of the century.

The federally mandated study was supposed to come out in December but was released by the Trump administration on Friday, at a time when many Americans are on a long holiday weekend, distracted by family and shopping.

[David Easterling](https://www.agci.org/redhen/contact/1287%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank), director of the Technical Support Unit at the NOAA National Centers for Environmental Information, emphasized that there was "no external interference in the report's development." He added that the climate change the Earth is experiencing is unlike any other.

"The global average temperature is much higher and is rising more rapidly than anything modern civilization has experienced, and this warming trend can only be explained by human activities," Easterling said.

Coming from the [US Global Change Research Program](https://www.globalchange.gov/nca4), a team of 13 federal agencies, the[Fourth National Climate Assessment](https://www.globalchange.gov/nca4) was put together with the help of 1,000 people, including 300 leading scientists, roughly half from outside the government.

It's the second of two volumes. [The first,](https://science2017.globalchange.gov/) released in November 2017, concluded that there is "no convincing alternative explanation" for the changing climate other than "human activities, especially emissions of greenhouse gases."

This is serious. The ocean is predicted to rise 5m by the turn of the century.

This is in the lifetime of my own children. In the lives of your own children and grandchildren too.

The earth is in serious trouble and we must act before it truly is too late

The promises we make at baptism are not just creedal statements from the 4th century that attempt to describe WHAT we believe, rather, these are promises that outline HOW we are to live our Christian faith – making Jesus King and Lord of every aspect of our lives,

* Our Actions
* Our Intentions
* Our Decisions

The toughest moments in life are often the ones that teach us the most and have the potential to transform us and our world.

But being on the precipice of a difficult decision, or a fractured relationship, or a health or environmental crisis can be frightening and indeed risky….a watershed moment…things can go in one direction or another.

How does one, as a follower of Jesus navigate and make a choice when faced with an ethical or moral dilemma?

Our Anglican tradition has some wisdom and helpful resources to guide us.

Do you remember last week the first past of the baptism after Shiva was presented by Jill?

There were some initial questions – you can get a book and cheat. Anyone remember? P154 BAS

3 turning away questions:

Question: Do you renounce Satan and all the spiritual forces of wickedness that rebel against God?

Answer: I renounce them.

Question: Do you renounce the evil powers of this world which corrupt and destroy the creatures of God? Answer: I renounce them.

Question: Do you renounce all sinful desires that draw you from the love of God?

Answer: I renounce them.

In those earliest centuries of the faith, the candidate was instructed to turn toward the west (the direction from which the sun sets and darkness falls) and answer the questions as if standing face-to-face with the devil. They even were sometimes asked to reach out as if trying to touch him.

3 Turning to Christ questions: In the ancient church the candidate would face the East – the rising sun, turning their back on the darkness.

Question: Do you turn to Jesus Christ and accept him as your Saviour?

Answer: I do.

Question: Do you put your whole trust in his grace and love?

Answer: I do.

Question: Do you promise to obey him as your Lord?

Answer: I do.

When we spend some time reflecting on what these statements mean, we can see how they have the potential to inform our thinking when we make decisions.

“Do you renounce the evil powers of this world which corrupt and destroy the creatures of God? “ I *do* renounce them …

then … “Do you turn to Christ and accept him as Lord?”…. This is our Decision – I do – a promise, a vow - in the NOW

Let us look at the next part of the covenant (p155)– These are the bits we all answer “ I will with God’s help…….” This is an Intention AND Action.. I promise I will do it– ongoing, and in the FUTURE – I will with Gods help.

Some other versions of Christianity proclaim the bible as the literal word of God and thus one’s Christian life be lived out abiding by the rules set out there-in.

In the RC church there is an emphasis is on the teachings – the catechism and canon laws of the church. These is a combination of biblical teachings and Papal rules and dogma which are reflective of interpretations of how Catholic Christians must live their lives.

In the late 1500s Richard Hooker’s Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity set out a “middle way” – via media - between the extremes of Catholicism and Calvinism (Protestantism) a thoughtful and moderate theology that rejected the authority of popes for that of Scripture. ….

…..but also drew heavily on Christian writers of the first several centuries in interpreting the faith. Such scholarly attention to the early church has been characteristic of Anglican theology ever since, and the theological compromises developed by Hooker -Scripture, Tradition and Reason. (<https://liturgical.wordpress.com/2015/01/22/anglicanism-thomas-cranmer-and-richard-hooker-in-the-context-of-scripture-reason-and-tradition/>)

When we need to make a moral decision – we take time to prayerfully reflect and ponder.

We remember **who and whose we are** as we consider our baptism and this calls us to take action rather than procrastinate or remain safely indecisive.

Thus serious thinking, prayer and research is required – look to scripture, tradition and common reason – investigate, find out the facts for ourselves…to be discerning, to be cautious and discerning of fake news and corruption – and trying and see as many aspects of the issue as possible

Then we must open the most important “app of all” – our conscience. This is the most important step of all.

I must take time and effort to prayerfully examine how I honestly feel about the issue at hand – what my heart and gut instinct are telling me.

I must be brave enough to let this authenticity and honesty shine through even though it may be difficult, challenging, even controversial.

I must be true to myself and be open to changing my long-held views- there just might be another way.

Despite the RC church having so many rules, obligations and laws that are heavily influenced by church authority, the official teaching of the RC church is *“the primacy of an informed conscience”* (<https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2017/11/11/pope-francis-reaffirms-primacy-conscience-amid-criticism-amoris-laetitia>)

A person is compelled to listen to AND OBEY their conscience before any of the rules of the church or pope.

When people partake in civil disobedience it is a matter of them responding to their deeply held private convictions – their conscience.

There have been many examples of Anglican involvement in civil disobedience, indeed many people from many faiths.

 So often social change is a result civil disobedience – Rosa Parks, Ghandi, Mandela, Jimmy Carter, Martin Luther King Jr, Oscar Schindler, Chief Joseph, the early Christians, even Jesus himself.

On Friday, I was shocked to learn form a FB post that Rev Laurel was sentenced to 7 days jail and $2000 in court costs for her part in a peaceful protest of the Kinder Morgan pipeline in Burnaby.([https://www-thestar-com.cdn.ampproject.org/v/s/www.thestar.com/amp/vancouver/2018/11/23/anglican-priest-gets-seven-days-jail-time-for-trans-mountain-protest.html?usqp=mq331AQECAFYAQ==&fbclid=IwAR0O3pVBEuTpmhtZvMIZQOX3\_Bdy0MbPtfbJa9fI1Z2LTocFdeYbDsQ4l1I&amp\_js\_v=0.1 - referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com&amp\_tf=From %251%24s&ampshare=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.thestar.com%2Fvancouver%2F2018%2F11%2F23%2Fanglican-priest-gets-seven-days-jail-time-for-trans-mountain-protest.html](https://www-thestar-com.cdn.ampproject.org/v/s/www.thestar.com/amp/vancouver/2018/11/23/anglican-priest-gets-seven-days-jail-time-for-trans-mountain-protest.html?usqp=mq331AQECAFYAQ%3D%3D&fbclid=IwAR0O3pVBEuTpmhtZvMIZQOX3_Bdy0MbPtfbJa9fI1Z2LTocFdeYbDsQ4l1I&amp_js_v=0.1#referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com&amp_tf=From%20%251%24s&ampshare=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.thestar.com%2Fvancouver%2F2018%2F11%2F23%2Fanglican-priest-gets-seven-days-jail-time-for-trans-mountain-protest.html))

Her private convictions, informed by her baptismal covenant, scripture, tradition and reason and with much prayer and discernment, led her to the point of civil disobedience.

She is committed to her faith, and deeply held reverence, concern and care for the earth and for social justice.

Honestly, I am ashamed to say that sit on the fence on this issue.

Maybe because I’m gutless and a coward,…

….but the real reason is that I don’t feel I have given this issue the adequate time and consideration required to move from a flippant opinion, based on what I hear on the CBC morning news and Facebook, - to a prayerfully discerned and well informed, honest conviction…….where I’m driven to follow my own conscience and take action one way or another.

Ironically in today’s Gospel we have Jesus face to face with Pilate. He has been arrested -this is political – he is a threat to the established order – Jesus has a habit of turning the ways of the world upside down.

He is the King of Love, the servant King, not the king of power, wealth and status. The LORD that Mary his mother sings of in the Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55) – IS the one who casts the mighty from their thrones and life’s up the lowly, fills the starving with good things and sends the rich away empty.

Picture the scene – maybe go home and revisit this episode in the gospels and see the details -there is a lot of back and forth and it is clear that Pilate, and his wife are having trouble with their consciences.

Pilate most certainly doesn’t know what to do.

There is a bleeding, weak and half naked Jesus standing in front of him and Pilate is asking him if he is a King…what kind of King?

Pilate is confused…he doesn’t know..

In Matthews version we read: – “While Pilate was still seated on the bench, his wife sent him a message, ‘Have nothing to do with that righteous man. I suffered much in a dream today because of him.’”

Pilate then asks a very profound question “What is Truth?” The last line of today’s gospel.

Yet even aware that he doesn’t know what to do and is still confused,…

He succumbs to the pressure and lobbying of the Jewish authorities, crowds and empire and orders Jesus to be put to death.

Later his feeling of guilt is ritualized by him washing his hands,….. and we are left wondering if perhaps Pilate did think Jesus was more than just an a crazy Hebrew prophet or criminal….as he insisted that the statement “King of the Jews” remain above Jesus’ head on the cross.

And the result: Pilate is the one who made the call to sentence Jesus to death – without having all the facts, without proper investigation, with doubts still arising.

Forever known in history as the one who had Jesus crucified.

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Reflecting on this gospel, I realise why I feel safer when I sit on the fence, particularly when I feel I don’t have enough knowledge or insight – an opinion or stand is not enough…but… here is the thing – both action and inaction has consequences

– sometimes dire life or death consequences…. And true discernment and understanding is vital… BEFORE WE ACT

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If someone is driven to take action to the point of breaking the law after prayerful consideration, discernment and following their conscience – who am I to judge?

So a word of caution -It is ok to disagree with somebody, but disagreement and differences can potentially destroy relationships.

Jesus is the king of Love, the king of relationships – love one another.

When political lines are drawn, and we touch on those intersections of politics and faith we need to remember the call to love.

We are entitled to our own opinions - they are simply opinions, and we are called to live out our faith in accordance with our own informed consciences….to strive for justice and peace and to protect the dignity of every human being.

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The earth is in crisis, more than 85 000 children in Yemen have died of starvation since October 2015, the sea creatures are chocking in plastic and fires, floods and storms devastate nations as climate change advances like NEVER before.

It sure is easier to sit on the fence…. or be a bit braver and express and opinion – but as Christians, particularly when confronted with difficult and pressing choices,– we MUST take our calling seriously, ….and faithfully discern, learn and take action like never before…and it is not easy.

And We need to be safe and secure in our community of faith, we must respect one another and listen to differing views.

Holding a strong opinion is very different from the burden of an informed conscience.

A truly informed conscience is one where **Jesus is Lord and King of our hearts and lives, not Caesar**– and that can be a risky place, sometimes calling us to risk our reputations, friendships and even our lives.

The early Christians knew this well.

The Gradual hymn we sang before the gospel “God of Grace and God of Glory” CP 577 reading has this refrain:

 “Grant us wisdom, grant us courage -for the facing of this hour, for the living of these days, lest we miss your kingdoms goals, lest we fail ourselves and thee” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9dlFuuP-eGw>