

**Bible Study**  
**Proper 29, Year B**  
**November 22, 2015**

**(RCL) 2 Samuel 23:1-7; Psalm 132: 1-13, (14-19); Revelation 1:4b-8; John 18:33-37**

**2 Samuel 23:1-7**

“These are the last words of David,” the writer tells us. Whether they were composed by King David himself or (more likely) a group of compilers later, these verses tell a very different story of David’s life than the chapters of 1 and 2 Samuel that precede them. King David was an adulterer and a murderer, yet he is called “the man whom God exalted, the anointed of the God of Jacob, and the favorite of the Strong One of Israel.” The oracle invokes God’s covenant with David, and indeed, David’s utter dependence on the Strong One of Israel. The language of verse 4 and verses 6 and 7 is particularly rich in vivid imagery. Comparing the king to the sun (vs. 4) was common, especially in Egypt.

We read these verses on the final Sunday of the church year in anticipation of the coming of David’s descendent Jesus Christ, the One who *truly* rules over people with justice.

- Given what you know of David’s reign, how do you make sense of this oracle’s optimism?
- In light of what you believe and hope for in Christ’s reign, how do you make sense of the destruction of the godless in verses 6 and 7?
- How might this reading help us prepare our hearts for Advent?

**Psalm 132: 1-13, (14-19)**

*‘Let us go to his dwelling-place; let us worship at his footstool.’ Rise up, O LORD, and go to your resting-place, you and the ark of your might. Let your priests be clothed with righteousness, and let your faithful shout for joy. For your servant David’s sake do not turn away the face of your anointed one.’*  
(Psalm 132:7-10)

The Revised Common Lectionary allows ending the psalm after verse 13, but do read the whole song through for this study. Notice that the first several verses describe King David’s determination to carry out his oath, and that the final eight verses detail God’s oath to David and his descendants. Verses 7 to 10 form a hinge between the two oaths, calling on the victorious God to arrive in Zion and calling on the faithful to worship God there.

We hear echoes of the First Reading in this passage: God’s covenant with David and his descendants, God as the Strong and Mighty One, and security in God’s care for some, but destruction for David’s enemies.

- What has God promised you?
- How have you seen those promises fulfilled, even if only in part?
- What promises have you made to God?
- Are there any you would like to reaffirm now?

**Revelation 1:4b-8**

*“Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.”*

As grand as these verses are, they are not just abstract poetry. They were written by an historical person to first-century communities of Christ-followers. Scholars disagree about whether the book of Revelation was composed before the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE near the end of Nero's reign or in the final decade of the century. Regardless, John's audience was living with conflict and the real threat of oppression, if not martyrdom. Faithfulness to Jesus was costly!

John speaks as a messenger from God the Almighty and from Jesus Christ.

- In verse 5, John uses three titles for Christ: the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. What do those titles say about Jesus Christ?
- How might this understanding of Christ have impacted John's audience, given their contexts?
- There are many today who are persecuted for their faith and for their identities. Call to mind any recent news stories you know, or read World in Prayer (<http://www.worldinprayer.org>) for specific parts of the world in turmoil today.
- How might your relationship with God deepen through encountering their stories?
- How might you be called to participate with them in God's work of renewing the world?

### **John 18:33-37**

Jesus's accusers want to destroy him, so they have politicized the charge in order to draw Pilate, a mid-level bureaucrate, into their religious dispute. The scene before us appears to be one man standing helpless against a batch of influential religious leaders who happen to have the ear of the politician in charge. But is it?

Pilate wonders if Jesus is a threat to Rome or indeed, to his own power. Jesus stands firm in his refusal to engage the specific political charge, saying only, "My kingdom is not from this world. If it were, I would not be in this situation." Jesus's resolute calm in the face of Pilate's questioning must have frustrated the Roman governor.

There's a kind of delicious paradox here. The man who looks like he holds all the power is exposed as one who can't even get a straight answer out of the prisoner. The Judean leaders who presented Jesus to Pilate are left standing outside while Pilate shuffles between them and Jesus. The one who was dragged in and is on trial for his life is, in truth, Ruler of Everything.

- What kind of king is Jesus Christ?
- What signs of Christ's rule do you see today?
- How are we called to live in light of Christ's rule?

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*Published by the Office of Mission Communications of the Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society, 815 Second Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017.*

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