

**Spring Lake Presbyterian Church**  
**Pastor: Rev. Kathryn M. Treadway**  
**November 25, 2007**

**Luke 1:68-79**

<sup>68</sup>“Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has looked favorably on his people and redeemed them. <sup>69</sup>He has raised up a mighty savior for us in the house of his servant David, <sup>70</sup>as he spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, <sup>71</sup>that we would be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us. <sup>72</sup>Thus he has shown **the mercy** promised to our ancestors, and has remembered his holy covenant, <sup>73</sup>the oath that he swore to our ancestor Abraham, to grant us <sup>74</sup>that we, being rescued from the hands of our enemies, might serve him without fear, <sup>75</sup>in holiness and righteousness before him all our days. <sup>76</sup>And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, <sup>77</sup>to give knowledge of salvation to his people by the forgiveness of their sins. <sup>78</sup>By the **tender mercy** of our God, the **dawn from on high will break upon us**, <sup>79</sup>to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.”

**Jeremiah 29:11-15**

<sup>11</sup>For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. <sup>12</sup>Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you. <sup>13</sup>When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart, <sup>14</sup>**I will let you find me**, says the LORD, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, says the LORD, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile.

## A Hope and a Future

It seems that as soon as we begin to feel full from the turkey, rolls, dressing, pumpkin pie, and all of those marvelous Thanksgiving vegetables, the Christmas ads begin, telling us what we just **have** to buy not only for others, but also for ourselves this Christmas season. We've become numb to the Christmas trees that deck the halls of the stores on November 1. We've become accustomed to the day-after-Thanksgiving shopping sales that beg us to spend hard-earned Christmas money on the “perfect” gift. We've become programmed to forget that the Sunday after Thanksgiving is a celebration of the Reign of Christ.

When I was a teenager, my church celebrated Christmas by putting on the Living Nativity every year. (explain what that was and how you rotated up into bigger and “better” parts). But, between the ages of 12 and 16, I was always an angel. To “be” an angel, we had to don white choir robes, similar to those behind me, and white handbell gloves (no, we didn't use bells) and then climb on top of a rickety stable. We lay flat during the telling of the Christmas story until, at the very end, the flood lights shown upon us and we slowly stood to our feet raising our wings as Handel's Hallelujah Chorus played on a stereo. Now, as you can imagine, it's pretty difficult for a 12 or 13 year old to stand still for somewhere around 4 minutes with her arms lifted in the air. We frequently mouthed along, hoping it would make the pain recede faster. But it's a memory that floats down to me every year as the television proclaims the glory of the dollar. Every year as the consumer bug begins to tickle my fancy, I hear those wonderful words: “For the Lord God omnipotent reign-eth. Hallelujah! And He shall reign forever and ever! King of Kings and Lord of Lords! Hallelujah! Hallelujah!” And I think: Ahh, yes, this is what it's all about.

Today marks the end of our Christian year. Today is the day in which we celebrate the reign and the rule of the king of kings forever, and ever, hallelujah! Hallelujah! Long after our last dollar has been spent, long after our last breath has been breathed, the praises of the reigning Christ will continue to be heard, for his kingdom has no end.

Today's Gospel lesson includes the words of instruction to John the Baptist, the one who would go before Jesus and prepare the way of the Lord. Seems strange that the scripture at the end of the church year would be the same one that is frequently used early in Advent, the beginning of the church year. The proclamation, however, is that the one who was to come – that is the Messiah, Christ – would reign in such a way as to bring about a dawn of hope. *78By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, 79to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.*"

According to Luke's gospel, the reign of Christ includes us, offering to us the mercy of God that forgives sin and that erases our many darkneses. The reign of Christ could easily occur without any thought to having mercy upon us, yet God in Christ desires the transformation of all creation, that we may have a hope and a future, that we may be guided into the way of peace, that we may witness the glory of God and respond with the angels, wings held high, "Hallelujah! Hallelujah!"

God is a God of mercy and love. We, who are minute before the awe-inspiring greatness of God, are asked to serve alongside the reigning Christ. *72Thus he has shown the mercy promised to our ancestors, and has remembered his holy covenant, 73the oath that he swore to our ancestor Abraham, to grant us 74that we, being rescued from the hands of our enemies, might serve him without fear, 75in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.*

Today both Jack Ulmer and John Bender are being ordained and installed as officers of the church of Jesus Christ, agreeing to serve alongside the reigning Christ. Jack comes to serve as an elder. John comes to serve as a deacon. Both have recognized the call of God upon their lives.

They come with interesting stories – both were raised in the church and abandoned any sort of regular worship when they entered the military. And both had heart attacks that caused them to wonder what God had in store for them when they were restored to health. For Jack, his new lot on life suddenly became a chance for him to show God's love to as many people as he could by simply caring for them. For John, his new lot on life became a chance for him to recognize the reign of Christ in every breath he has been given. Both want to make the most of every day they have been given, recognizing that there are no guarantees on life. And so, with what days they have, both have agreed to spend the next 3 years serving God through the church and in their communities. Both recognize that God has plans for them . . . plans to give them a hope and a future. And rather than ignore the fact that God is calling them, they are both willing to say "Here I am, Lord."

When we recognize the greatness of God in our lives, when the many miracles that occur around us everyday give us pause to be thankful, we truly want to serve this reigning Christ. For Christ is the one who has forgiven us and opened our understanding to the living and ruling God who understands the depths of humanity and uses us just as we are. We may think we are too far gone to be asked to serve the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords, but Jeremiah encourages us. <sup>13</sup>*When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart, <sup>14</sup>I will let you find me, says the LORD, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, says the LORD, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile.*

The mercies of our God are great enough to rescue us from our own selves – are enough to send a Savior into the world to remind us to worship God with our lives. We are each called to the ministries of God's church in this world. We are called to proclaim that the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords reigns among us and, when we recognize such a gift, we are called to respond with our lives. Like Jack and John, we are asked to believe

that every day is a gift in which we can choose to recognize God's mercies and serve God's world. For our Lord God omnipotent reigneth! Hallelujah!

I began today's sermon with the inevitable mention of the consumeristic culture that calls us to spend, spend, spend. We forget who we are when the department stores sing the carols of the greatest SALE of the year, but the reign of Christ continues long after the trees and shiny ornaments and lights and sales have ended. The reign of Christ calls us to offer ourselves, something that can not be bought, to the Lord's service for eternity. Beginning now, we are asked to remove the repetitive soundtrack that plays "it's the most wonderful time of the year" and offer instead the lasting glory of Christ's eternal reign to a world in need of a hope and a future.

Because of God's mercies in the Lord Christ, we are loved, we are forgiven, we are made new day after day. May we have the courage to offer ourselves to be set apart to continue Christ's work of love and forgiveness to the world. For only then will we see the dawn of Christ's light begin to break. Amen.