

On this day we are reminded that Jesus is king not just once a year and on a throne but throughout all of time and in every place and for every life.

Daniel Clendenin says, “In its simplest terms, the kingdom of God that Jesus announced and embodied is...mercy not vengeance, care for the vulnerable instead of privileges for the powerful, generosity instead of greed ... embrace rather than exclusion...The ancient Hebrews had a marvelous word for this kind of life: Shalom...”

The reign of Christ the King is Peace.

But let's be honest - This has been a tough month to talk about a season of peace, and even as we look forward to Advent and prepare for the birth of the Prince of Peace, we are having to gear up for the Christmas wars.

Red cups or snowflake cups, Merry Christmas or Happy Holidays, and more than displays of tacky-tour front-yard decorations, we are overwhelmed by displays of humanity's inhumanity.

At the heart of Jesus' life and message is his desire for peace.

Peace on earth is what angels promised poor shepherds on the night he was born.

Jesus tells us that peacemakers are blessed, and on more than one occasion he told his friends, go in peace.

One of the very last things he said was "Peace I give you, but not as the world gives peace."

When Jesus insisted his kingdom was “*not of this world,*” he didn't mean it was merely spiritual nor to be found just over the horizon of time or even that he was speaking of heaven where all things are eventually made right.

The peace Jesus gives describes a life that is whole and complete and points to the prospect of healing.

We hear this in the words spoken by the prophet Malachi. All we know about Malachi is that his Hebrew name means “my messenger.”

The message that came to him was the word that the world was ending. I don't mean that the world was about to be destroyed.

I only mean that the world as it was, barren of hope and empty of God's presence was ending and a new world was beginning.

Such is the peace that Jesus is talking about.

Yes, he calls us follow him as the way to finding peace with God; but even more, his life is the truth for people to be at peace with one another.

Stop and think about it for a moment. When was the last time you heard someone say to you, except in a service of worship "Peace be with you"?

You realize, of course, the two most energetic portions of worship are one, when we get up and move around to pass the peace of Christ and then, second, when worship is over and we get up and go!

But shouldn't that be the way of life, shouldn't that be the message we take with us when go into the world?

Peace be with you!

But as Jim Evans pointedly says, “In our present moment, saying peace be with you just doesn't make much sense. We settle for "merry" and "happy," because it hurts too much to speak of peace when there is no peace.”

Pope Francis goes so far to say that Christmas festivities will seem empty in a world which has chosen 'war and hate'...he said a few years ago, "...there will be lights, parties, Christmas trees and nativity scenes... it's all a charade. The world continues to go to war. The world has not chosen a peaceful path."

Because Jesus is King, the reign of Christ is marked, not by who has the most guns, not through policies of power, but in places and people who serve the suffering.

Maybe you're sitting there thinking this is some Christmas-cookie way of living that is not grounded in the way the world works.

But that's just it; this is Jesus' peace, not the world's peace.

So how do we speak of what it means to you and me that Christ is born and reigns as the Prince of Peace in our world?

Maybe a place to start is with Christmas cards, as we move from this Christ the King Sunday into the season of Advent, just how do we claim the role of messenger for the Prince of Peace?

I looked around at the cards being offered, and I found that there are three or four basic values or themes which seem to show up most in Christmas cards.

One is a secular or commercial theme – a picture of Santa Claus and a bag full of toys over his back.

It's easy to say that the true meaning of Christmas is exploited by commercial interests.

But this is where the gospel was born, at the crossroads of secular and spiritual, commercial, residential, theological.

We Christians live in the midst of it, and we have something to say.

This card doesn't say it.

In addition to the blatantly commercial or secular cards on the market there are a great many that I would categorize as sentimental.

In this category of card, I would include those that show pictures of the home and hearth with a warm, cozy fire, and stockings hung over the fireplace mantel.

It seems fitting that we should uphold family life at Christmas. After all, what is Christmas but the story of the holy family traveling from Nazareth to Bethlehem under the oppressive politics of Rome and from Bethlehem to Egypt and back to Bethlehem as refugees escaping the violence of Herod the King?

But this is not the card that would tell that story.

And thinking about Mary and Joseph leads us to the third category of cards that I've found.

It is one you might imagine a minister would choose, the traditional picture of the nativity scene.

As I considered this card, I realized that most are a stylized, conventional interpretation that is far removed from the very primitive scene of the darkness and earthiness and mystery of the night when Jesus was born.

Secular, sentimental, stylized...I said there were four categories of Christmas cards, but the fourth is one that I couldn't find: a Christmas card that somehow expresses the faith of Christian living in 2017 and true to the story of Jesus' birth.

I looked and couldn't find one. And that's when it occurred to me...what so many are doing in 2017 is creating their own cards.

So what would that Christmas card look like?

This is what I've thought of. First of all, it would be shaped like a cell phone. In this age of instant communication, what other way to give a message about the good news?

And then, we live fast-paced lives, so I thought about a picture of an airplane; and because of the wars that infect our world, I would make it a jet fighter, to remind us that we desperately need some peace and goodwill on earth.

I would have that jet flying through a sky painted in thunderous, stormy, blood-red colors of the religious and political leaders in Bethlehem frightened by the news of this king to be born.

They attempted to suppress the truth, living by the lies of their power, and eventually used that power to assault the innocent and vulnerable in their world.

That's the atmosphere in which Christmas was born.

I would put that jet fighter flying over a church – not a quaint clapboard church of old New England, but a church of all doors - open for everyone.

And that's why I would have that church where everyone could get to it – not in some neighborhood set apart by the economics of who can buy a house there or gated by fear or race or privilege.

Maybe a bank, a courthouse, some apartments and low-income housing in this church's neighborhood.

This church would be like that stable, in the muck and the mire of life, if you will; where anyone and everyone could get to it;

And I would want a cross, not necessarily on the church but out front, for everyone to see; near the intersection where God meets us in this baby... a crossroad that when you come here, it is a time for a decision about which way your life will go following God's son... a junction where all sorts of people come together.

And I would want to put people in the picture: young people like Mary, anxious about the changes in her life, faithful and courageous in the choices that she's having to make... and people

like Joseph, good people, people of integrity, prayerful people.

And older people like Anna and Simeon who had waited for the coming of the Lord... and the shepherds, poor, low-class, hard-working... and the magi, people of a different culture, different religion...

All of them part of the picture of this wonderful message of the love of God, the peace of Jesus Christ, and the comfort of the Holy Spirit.

That would be my Christmas card, with a message inside that said: *"The gospel good news of Christ has been set loose in the world."*

I pray that is our message, "The gospel good news of Christ has been loosed on the world"

I pray that is our life: a messenger of God as a faithful descendant of the prophet Malachi.

That is what Jesus wants for us, gives to us.

Peace be with you.

TO GOD BE THE GLORY.