

I recently led a devotion at the beginning of one of our church council meetings, and I invited them to ponder the following question: Where are you finding new life? For many of our dear leaders, they are finding new life in the midst of the children in their life, their kids or grandkids or other beloved little ones. I'm certainly no exception - I'll take any opportunity I can to rejoice in my baby niece Charlotte.

For others, the new life they're finding is a little less concrete. It's a sense of a weight lifting, that we are less isolated now than we were a year ago, and there is an opening up to the world in a new way. It's a return to or discovery of new activities, hobbies, people, and passions that make life feel new again. For those who have been struggling with their mental health, finding new life can be as simple and powerful as finally having hope for what is to come, finally recognizing the light that shines in the darkness, and the darkness will not overcome it. Maybe it's an emergence from the haze of depression or strength from genuine caring for yourself.

Regardless of where we find new life, we know that it is promised to us in Christ Jesus. We are able to find life anew each day as we wake and rise, creation itself promising us a new day in the sun rising with us. We see this as a physical reminder that new life is here with us, and there is so much more yet to come. A whole day of light, and the promise of even more days yet to come.

In our Revelation reading today, we hear the words of God who proclaims, "I am the Alpha and Omega," and assurance that God is the one who was and is and is to come. The Alpha is the beginning, and the Omega is the ending, both of the Greek alphabet, sure, but also of creation and life itself. Life itself would be the words we create with these two letters, and all the others that come in between. Sometimes in words we know, other times in new words meant for our growth and learning. God is the one who authors life itself, who was there at the beginning, and will be there until our final days, when we are joined with Christ and our beloved communion of saints in the kingdom of heaven. God is present with us now, co-creating new life for us all, has been with us since the very beginning, and will certainly

continue to be with us wherever our journeys will lead, including on the last days when we are raised to be with him in heaven.

Today we are celebrating this continued authorship of life in God, as the reign of Christ, for Christ the King Sunday. Christ the King is basically the New Year's eve of the church year, and is the perfect time for us to consider both past reflection on the life that has been authored, and on future hopes and goals, what new life may be for us in the coming time. Just like when we think about New Year's in our usual, calendar context, it incites some reflection for us.

We look back at all that has happened in the past year, and consider resolutions or goals for the upcoming year as well.

That paradox of what has happened and our hope for what is yet to come is an excellent way of thinking about this reign of Christ as well. We know Christ lived about 2000 years ago, and in his living, gave us the incredible gift of his ministry, his death, and most importantly, his resurrection for the life to come. Thinking about Jesus puts us in a perpetual state of here and not yet. Advent is really the time when we lean into this truth - that we know Jesus is here with us, each and every day, and there is also new life to come, hope for what is to come, the reign of Christ and kingdom of God that is still yet to come.

In our Gospel reading today, Jesus proclaims that his kingdom is not of this world. That his kingdom is the truth, the reason he was born into this world, and that those who know the truth listen to his voice, but not everyone follows his reign, his kingdom, his ways and instruction, hence why he is being persecuted, even by his fellow Jewish people at the time.

Jesus' kingdom being both true and not of this world also helps demonstrate what this phenomenon of here and not yet really means. We know the truth of Christ Jesus, the new life and new covenants in his blood, the hope and joy of his resurrection, which accompany us each and every day. And yet, we also know there is so much more in the kingdom of God that is not yet here. We do not live in a world of perfect justice and peace, love and goodness, and yet we have hope that these things are yet to

come by the power of God. We get closer to these truths and tenets of God's reign and kingdom, and our work out of love for God and neighbor is what helps to bring this even closer.

So when we think about this past year, how our faith has grown and been tested, strengthened and faced difficulty, how can we continue in hope for what is yet to come? What could our Christ-centered "new year's resolutions" be?

First, we can have hope in the assurance of Christ Jesus, our King, our Prince of Peace, promised Messiah, Son of God, Alpha and Omega, and Light of every time and place. There is always hope to be found in Jesus himself, in his life and ministry and new life as our resurrected Lord and Savior.

And what really lays the foundation for our hope is the love of God in Christ Jesus. In many, many places throughout scripture, we hear that God and Jesus are fundamentally rooted in love for humanity, that nothing we do will ever separate us from the deep love that is our birthright as created human beings. Our Gospel text today happens just before Jesus dies on the cross for our sake, so that we may always receive the grace and forgiveness of God, that we may be saved from the power of sin that threatens to separate us from God, and that we will always be able to find new life. New life is a result of God's great love for us in the physical person of Jesus Christ, the one who died and defeated death and sin for our sake. We need not be afraid of what the future holds because anything that would keep us from God has already been defeated. This life-saving hope is out of God's love for us, thanks be to God.

And as for our Christ-centered "new year's resolutions"? Friends, I encourage you to live into hope. To live into newness of life. To live into the great and abundant, God-given love that gives and sustains life each and every day. May you resolve not just for the sake of your self-betterment, but for the sake of your neighbors. For the sake of God who first loved us and teaches us how to love in abundance. May you resolve to see the

newness, the life, the hope, rather than the same-old, the life-taking, the fear. May you open your hearts to the presence of God in our world, whose kingdom is brought even nearer by our great love for God and for one another. And may you resolve yourself to the reign of Christ, who is present with us now, who co-authored life from the very beginning, and will continue to reign as Lord of all throughout heaven and earth. Thanks be to God, Amen.