We are all getting ready for Thanksgiving, a great holiday which gives us the chance to give thanks. It is not related to any particular faith community, but it is very religious, if you believe as I do, that gratitude is at the heart of our faith. I love thanksgiving. I remember as a child singing that old song:

*Over the river and through the woods*
To grandmother's house we go.
The horse knows the way to carry the sleigh
through the white and drifted snow.

I loved to go to my grandmother's house but the sleigh—we lived in Florida-no snow or sleigh! Today is not only a time to give thanks; it is the last Sunday of the church year. Christ the King/The Reign of Christ Sunday. Two texts from the New Testament help us on this day.
John 18:33-37
Revelation 1:4-8

*Gracious God, we come into your presence to proclaim that Christ is our Lord. Yet there are so many demands in our lives for other loyalties, other commitments. We pray that you will open our hearts and minds that we might follow this Christ, who came among us as a servant who lived and died and whom you raised again so that we might have hope and who calls us to be his body in the world. Empower us, strengthen us, lead us in the name of Christ our Lord. Amen.*

An anchor on the evening news was reading an account on television of another horrific event that took place in the human community. After telling the story, the reporter looked up from her script and stared into the camera and said, “Isn't that the worst thing you’ve ever heard? Just overwhelming!”

I found her spontaneous response to this tragedy compelling. It hit home with me! Here is a newscaster who makes her living reporting all sorts of tragedies and headaches. I was amazed that she was moved to great pity, despite her daily diet of bombs and violence and death and pain. British theologian David Frost has called our age “the age of overwhelmedness.” He contends that we are exposed through the media to so much tragedy, so much heartbreak, so much despair. We face it in our own lives every day with those we love—and frequently we are overwhelmed. Where is the latest disaster? We know about them instantly, don’t we? *Overwhelmedness!*

I have heard some people say, “I don’t watch the evening news anymore. It’s too painful.” But is that an appropriate response for a person of faith? To turn our back on the suffering world? Or maybe we just pick up the paper and turn immediately to the sports section. (For some of us that would supply some solace; for others, it would be pain and misery all over again.) And then there are the comics! I like to read the comics. Comic relief is helpful. Yet, we know that turning away is an inappropriate response to the illness called overwhelmingness.
Karl Barth, a great theologian of the last century, is famous for urging Christians to read the Bible with the newspaper in the other hand. I tried that. It’s a very tough balancing act—both physically and emotionally. His suggestion was a reminder that as Christians we need not to turn away from the world but rather to look at the world through the eyes of faith, particularly the lens of the life and death and resurrection of Christ.

I want to suggest to you this morning that the church has a remedy. The church has a response that the people of faith have been practicing down through the centuries. In case you’ve missed it, I want to lift it up for you this morning. On this last Sunday of the church year, we celebrate the reign of Christ. Our text is from the Revelation of John, the last book of the Bible. It is written by John as he is sitting in jail, imprisoned, writing to a band of Christians clinging to their life on the fringe of the Roman Empire, an empire so strong that it could step on them any minute. They would no longer exist. They are feeling overwhelmed.

The vision from the Isle of Patmos from a prison cell begins not with whining and with tears, but with great shouts of praise. The letter begins not in despair, but in Doxology—with praise, in cadence that reflects the hymns of the early church. Listen again:

“Grace to you and peace from him who is, who was and who is to come, from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of this earth.”

When the world seemed to be crushing him, the poet offers a doxology. That, my friends, is the response for overwhelmedness. You practiced it this morning a few minutes ago: “Praise God from whom all blessings flow; praise him, all creatures here below.”

Doxology—the word means “praise.” In a world that often seems to be going to hell in a hand basket, we pause to remember, especially on this Sunday, who is in charge, whose world it is and to whom we belong. It is that Jewish carpenter’s son from Nazareth, who had the audacity to be a faithful witness by standing before Pontius Pilate, the man who reflected the power of the world in which he lived, the most powerful nation the world had ever known. Pilate asked him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” “Who told you that? My kingdom is not of this world.”

The faithful witness is now joined by a heavenly chorus, praising God from whom all blessings flow. Many of us have sung the Doxology once a week for all our lives. I tried to figure out how many times I have sung the Doxology in my life. It’s somewhere in the 3,000’s, I think.

My favorite Doxology story is a baseball anecdote. Now I know that football season is ending, and basketball season is beginning. This is not baseball season, but this is a baseball story. In 1988, the Los Angeles Dodgers won the National League Championship and the World Series. The Dodgers had a great pitcher by the name of Orel Hersheiser. Hersheiser was a mild-looking young man whose nickname was “Bulldog,” because of his fierce competitiveness. In 1988, Hersheiser won about every award a pitcher can win. He pitched 63 consecutive scoreless innings, still a record. In the World Series, he started and won several games. Orel Hersheiser was the Most Valuable Player and the toast of the baseball world that year.

After that storybook season, he was a guest of Johnny Carson on the Tonight Show. Carson was interviewing him, and he said, “How do you stay so calm and steady and focused, when there is so much pressure on you, in those situations where the game is coming down to the next batter and there you are on the pitcher’s mound, alone, with over 50,000 people in the stands and a television audience of millions?” Hersheiser’s
answer stunned Carson. He said, “I sing a hymn. I’m a Presbyterian, so I sing a hymn to myself that we sing every Sunday in my church.” Carson was momentarily speechless, and then he asked Hersheiser if he would sing it on NBC-TV—and he did. What he sang was, “Praise God from whom all blessings flow.” The Doxology!

Now what is that, my friends? Is that whistling in the dark? Is that turning our backs on reality? Is that a placebo to help us get through a tough situation? You may think so, but the Doxology is a reminder—in season and out of season—on whatever occasion we find ourselves—that this world in which we live belongs to the One who has created it, the One who has given us the gift of life, the One who stands beside us in good times and in bad times. We are saying that we believe and trust on a fundamental level in the very depths of our souls that this world is in the hands of a God who can be trusted. We are declaring our ultimate loyalty and devotion to that reality, and we are declaring that we, as individual men and women, by singing our praise to the one who has created us, from whom all blessings flow, and to whom, finally and ultimately, we belong—that we have a sense of calm and trust and faith in the midst of all the overwhelmingness of the world around us.

"Praise God, from whom all blessings flow." Marva Dawn, the theologian, writes, “We need the biggest dose of God we can get to shake us out of our societal sloth and summon us to behold God’s splendor.” Sometimes that’s hard to do in our personal lives, living in a world with so much pain and misery. We are far removed from some of the pain, but still it creeps up upon us.

Let me share with you how this works. A young woman who had been active in her church went away to college. It was not an easy transition for her at first. She was homesick and finding the work difficult. Her mother was leaving church one Sunday in late fall when the preacher asked her about Sarah. "She is struggling.” The pastor said, “I will be in touch with her.” So he wrote Sarah telling her that he was praying for her. She was missed. "Remember the hymn we often sing in worship: ‘God of Grace and God of Glory on your people pour your power. Grant us wisdom, grant us courage for the living of these days.’" Sarah knew that hymn well, and as she left the university post office, she found herself humming it and she thought about those people who sat around her in church and sang the hymn with her. She knew that they were in her corner, and her spirits were lifted.

“What is truth?” Pilot asked Jesus, and we all still want to know the truth. There is one truth that we can count on, which helps us deal with the feeling of overwhelmedness, it is that in giving praise and thanksgiving to God, we are in touch with a reality that gives us hope and courage and strength. Isn’t it when we join our voices in the great hymns of praise that we know in the depths of our being what this world can never teach us? Doxology keeps us focused on who we are and whose we are, and this truth is that we belong to God, who loves us, and who in Jesus Christ reigns! As that wonderful line in one of my favorite hymns “For all the Saints” puts it so well:

And when the strife is fierce, the warfare long,
steals on the ear the distant triumph song,
and hearts are brave again and arms are strong.

Alleluia! Alleluia!

Amen.