

Christ The King 2019

Today, everything is in white as we celebrate this final Sunday in our church year.

While December 31 marks the end of our calendar year; today ends our church year.

And so we will be moving from Luke's gospel to Matthew's starting next week, because a new year begins: Advent is upon us, and the color changes to purple.

The Advent wreath shall be lit and the readings are focused on the end of all things.

And on this last Sunday of our church year, everything we've tried to learn all year long, every push against what we think is real, every challenge to our love affair with the status quo, it all comes front and center today, this day when we celebrate Christ the King.

You might think of today as the great "corrective" when it comes to what we so often take to be the truth of our faith.

For many churches, Christ the King is celebrated as a great triumph, with crowns of gold and fine bejeweled thrones; a celebration that in turn creates priests who think they have the right to abuse their parishioners and bishops who see themselves as God's princes on earth.

Thinking about how full of baloney we can be when it comes to questions about God came up in an old Peanuts cartoon.

There is Snoopy sitting on top of his dog house, typing away, and Charlie Brown says "I hear you're writing a book on theology, I hope you have a good title."

"I have the perfect title," Snoopy thinks to himself, as he types:

'Has It Ever Occurred To You That You May Be Wrong?'

Today's readings are a message to the whole world about how we are all of us so often wrong about the nature of God, and the nature of salvation, and how it is that we are to live on this earth.

All too often, it's all about looking out for ourselves, and those closest to us, which is why the prophet Jeremiah is all riled up this morning: because the leaders of the people are bent on self-preservation rather than service, enriching themselves rather than caring for the needy.

Not much has changed.

Today, it's about living in a militarized country, keeping our economy strong, our retirement accounts fat and worshipping celebrities.

When it comes to religion, too many believe that our main job is to keep our nose clean, help out occasionally, show up when necessary, and give a nod to the old man in the sky — who's mostly ignoring us.

For too many Christians, the nature of religion is a very private relationship with God that has only the "right believers" on the inside and the vast multitudes of the condemned on the outside.

Is it any wonder that the number of those who claim NONE as their religious affiliation is skyrocketing?

No wonder so many run from the church, because the outrageous truth of our faith is so often buried, hidden, or simply denied.

The chaplain at Harvard tells about a young man who plops down on a chair in his office and exclaims: "I don't believe in God!"

The chaplain replies: "Tell me about the God you don't believe in. I probably don't believe in that God either." Yancy, *The Jesus I Never Knew*, 264.

A few of us experienced the narrow mindedness that turns so many off to what passes for Christianity these days as we waited in line at Foodbank, preparing to pick up food in our church van.

As many of you know we have a quote from Mahatma Gandhi on the side of the van that says: "be the change you want for the world."

And as we sat in the van waiting our turn, a man across the street, holding a Bible in his hand, began yelling at us!

"You call yourselves Christians?!"

"How can you quote a man who is burning in hell because he was not a Christian!"

Gandhi, the man Martin Luther King Jr. called the truest embodiment of the Christian life in the entire 20th century, is, in that man's narrow vision, an outcast, a pagan, condemned to the fires of hell.

All of which gets us to our readings today, because in them, God shows us what God is really like.

Paul is meditating about the Cosmic Christ, the one in whom **all things** live and move and have their being; the one through whom **all things** are made; the Alpha and the Omega.

“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; all things have been created through him and for him.

For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell....”

The majesty and awe and wonder of it all cannot, in the end, be expressed with words.

One can merely sit, in amazement and wonder.

Yet the source, the seed, of all of this glory is the bloody, naked, tortured Jesus, hanging from nails pounded through wrists and ankles, pinned to a tree.

And this Jesus offers precisely what the Cosmic Christ offers: forgiveness, peace, reconciliation.

And here’s the rub.

The only way to get to forgiveness, peace and reconciliation, is through the cross.

Because, as the old priest came to understand:

“The only way to finally and fully conquer evil is to smother it within a willing, living human being.

There, like blood in a sponge, evil loses its power and is, at long last, absorbed, disarmed." Yancy, *The Jesus I Never Knew*, 204, paraphrased.

"The healing of evil can be accomplished only by love, and love always requires a willing sacrifice." Scott Peck, paraphrased.

Think of those peacefully protesting in Hong Kong, and our African American sisters and brothers enduring police dogs in Birmingham and police brutality in Ferguson, think about the kupuna atop Mauna Kea.

"Whenever the willing sacrifice of love happens, there is a shift in the world," a shift away from distrust and anger, a shift toward kindness, toward decency. Id.

And so it is that today's readings upend our popular notions of God and power and salvation.

God is neither puppet master nor dictator; God is our fellow traveler who also endures great suffering.

But does this truth about God have anything to say to our day-to-day lives?

To ask the question is to answer it.

Our lives are a constant seesawing between joy and regrets, caring for elderly parents or young children, and sometimes, perhaps even often, it seems that we are at our wits end; perhaps sometimes even wondering if this is all life has to offer.

The truth, the beauty, the wonder of the fact that God comes to us in weakness is true and beautiful and wonderful because it sanctifies our weakness, and makes holy our anxieties and fears and frustrations.

But not only that.

God promises that in due time all of the things that we find most troubling in life are going to be somehow changed – transformed, transfigured, into a beauty, a wisdom and a truth beyond imaging.

The caterpillars of our lives shall become butterflies, the mere seeds that we are today are destined to become fragrant flowers.

And so it is with that hope on this Christ the King Sunday, that:

“As you learn more and more **how God** works, you will learn how to do **your work**.

You’ll have the strength to stick it out over the long haul – not the strength of grimly gritting your teeth – but the glory-strength that only God can give.

A strength that endures the unendurable.

A strength that spills over into joy!

So let us head out into the world, thanking the Father who makes us strong enough to embrace everything bright and beautiful, as he rescues us from darkness, as he plops us down, smack dab in middle of the kingdom, the kingdom of his beloved Son.” Col 1:11-14 (The Message, paraphrased).

+amen